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of Mystery

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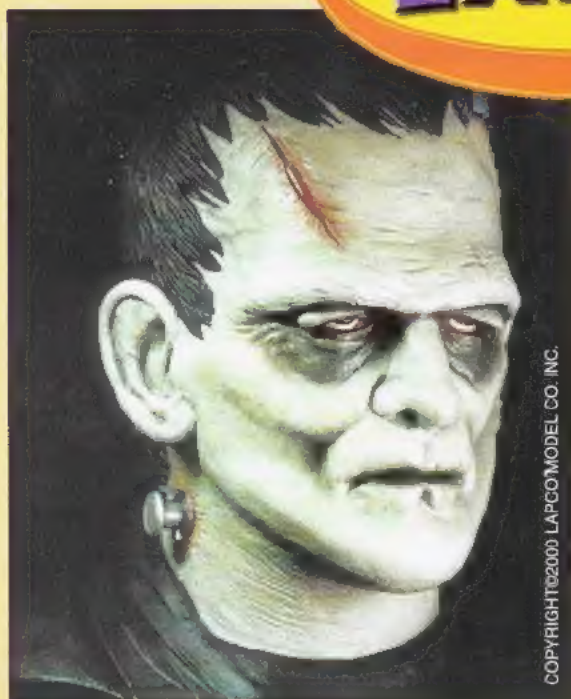
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COVER: THE MONSTER AND THE GIRL (1941), I MARRIED A WITCH (1942)

Scarlet Letters

Just finished *Scarlet Street* #36 and it is swellish beyond compare. Every time I think, "what other favorite of mine can they unearth," you go and unearth another favorite of mine, in this case the divine Phyllis Kirk. What a treat Michael Mallory's interview with her was! I fell in love with her as a young sprig of a twig of a youth when I discovered *THE THIN MAN*. I thought that show was aces, very urbane (I'd also loved *MR. AND MRS. NORTH*), and witty and clever. And I loved that they slept in separate beds and suggested that to my parents. (Separate cities would have been even better, although my father snored so loud you could have heard him from a separate city.) Phyllis' *TWILIGHT ZONE* episode was also one of my favorites. A beautiful woman with a terrific personality.

Also enjoyed the interview with Victoria Price and the piece on *HOUSE OF WAX*. You won't believe this, but when I was an actor in the seventies I used to run into Andre de Toth at commercial auditions! Yes, in his elderly years Mr. de Toth tried to get acting roles in commercials. I remember walking into an audition, signing in, and seeing his name on the sheet. I thought it was a joke until I looked around the room and saw an older gentleman with an eyepatch sitting there. I went up to him and told him I was a big fan of his, especially *HOUSE OF WAX*, and he seemed very happy that someone knew who he was. It would be interesting to know if he actually got a part in any of the commercials.

Anyway, congrats on yet another stellar issue.

Bruce Kimmel
Studio City, CA

Thanks for the memories: Issue #36 was wonderful. Was there anyone who didn't fall in love with Phyllis Kirk?

As to your classified, I'm curious if you ever turned up a video of *NIGHT LIFE OF THE GODS*. I've been wanting to see it for 30 years. Apparently a print was shown at the Cinecon convention a few years back, but I haven't been able to find out whose it was. My two other Universal want items are *DESTINATION UNKNOWN* (1933) and *THIS WOMAN IS MINE* (1941). The former was never licensed to TV, the latter was. The latest BIB book lists many Universal titles available for TV licensing for the first time, so I guess there's hope.

Richard Bush
bustm@home.com

Nope, never found that video, but then we weren't exactly holding our collective breath waiting for it to happen. Happy the Phyllis Kirk interview has proved so popular!

I regret a foolish mistake which I made in the letter that you kindly pub-

lished in SS #36. Referring to Jude Law's stage appearance in Jean Cocteau's *LES PARENTS TERRIBLES*, I stated that he starred opposite Karen Black and Eileen Atkins. It should, of course, have been Kathleen Turner, not Karen Black. Mea Culpa.

Michael Draine, in reviewing Image Entertainment's DVD release of PRC's *STRANGLER OF THE SWAMP*, includes Josef Von Sternberg's *THE SHANGHAI GESTURE* as a PRC production. That is a mistake. *THE SHANGHAI GESTURE* was produced by Arnold Pressburger for United Artists, which was its original distributor. Would that PRC could have afforded a production of such magnitude with its celebrated cast!

I am delighted to read Bill Battaglia's letter complementing Ken Hanke's article on *WEREWOLF OF LONDON*. I have always considered this "the best werewolf film ever made." Unfortunately, because the later *WOLF MAN* with Lon Chaney Jr. became a franchise, Universal has deliberately kept *WEREWOLF OF LONDON* in obscurity, even leaving any serious reference to the film out of Kevin Brownlow's superb television documentary on the Universal Horrors. Hopefully there will be a DVD release of it in the future. David Skal could, I am sure, produce a superb documentary to accompany the feature. Among its three principal players, even Henry Hull had a most definite association with genre titles; for



instance, he was a star of the original Broadway stage production of *THE CAT AND THE CANARY*.

Rumors are circulating of a planned film about the real-life feud between Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi when they were both at Universal in the 1930s. We would all welcome, I am sure, a serious film about either or both actors, but the so-called "feud" was a myth originated by the studio for publicity purposes and would be no more true to life than the portrayal of Lugosi in Tim Burton's *ED WOOD*, despite Martin Landau's superb performance as a fictional "horror has-been." Having known and worked with both actors, I know that it never existed.

Richard Gordon
Gordon Films, Inc.
New York, NY

Bravo to *Scarlet Street* for providing a fascinating look at the all-time wax museum classic, *HOUSE OF WAX*. (*Scarlet Street* #36) I am in full agreement with Richard Valley on this film being superior to its predecessor in every way. And Mr. Valley summed it up, quite nicely, when he referred to *MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM* as being "a clever and promising outline" and *HOUSE OF WAX* as "the final draft." I think it is a bit of an overstatement for the former's supporter, Ken Hanke, to refer to Mr. Valley's preference for the 1953 version as "lamentably, egregiously, even shockingly off-based, wrongheaded." And as for the "downright screwy part," well, that's why we love Mr. Valley, isn't it?

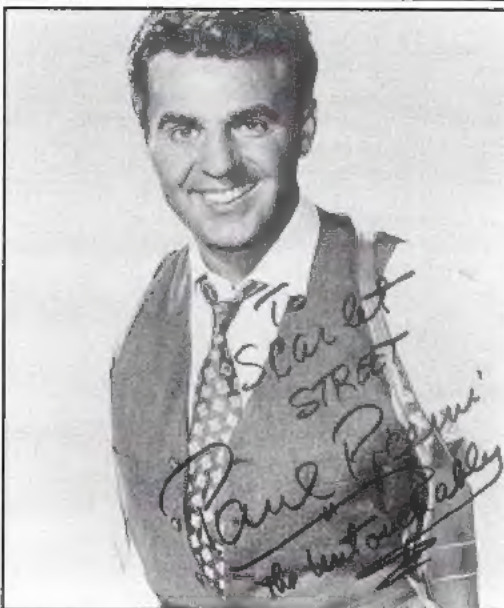
Matt M. Tewso
London, England

Just finished reading (in one avid sitting) *Scarlet Street* #35, that a dear (well, he's not cheap), mad American friend sent me today.

Being a 32-year-old single British woman, living in rainy Manchester, I sometimes feel annoyed at the paucity of classic films and good magazines that cater to a certain taste in blood available in the UK.

After reading Issue #35, I must say I was very impressed. It's well written, honest, intelligent, thoroughly researched, balanced, enthusiastic, and fun—a credit to you all! I particularly liked the features on *THE RETURN OF DRACULA* and the great interviews with its cast.

**WANTED! MORE
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Paul Picerni

Continued on page 8

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Here's the word on the Street!

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—Forrest J Ackerman

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—Magazines of the Movies

Scarlet Street is a thoroughly excellent publication. It's well-written, nicely designed, and extremely entertaining.

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This classy publication appeals to a wide audience . . . a sophisticated voice . . .

—Access

Everything about *Scarlet Street* appeals to the perverse lust for lunacy in me. Congratulations on a job well done.

—Rex Reed

Good columns and superior writing mark *Scarlet Street*.

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You'd be crazy not to buy *Scarlet Street*, a consistently enjoyable magazine.

—George Baxt

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SCARLET LETTERS

Continued from page 4

I also paid a quick visit to the Scarlet Website, another fantastic production! If these are an example of the usual standards of excellence you achieve, I shall be saving my pennies for a subscription in the near future!

Hats off to you guys, keep up the good work! Sudsy hugs and sloppy wet kisses, lots of love and squishy thingies from Suzanne and her pussy (Winston). Carry on carrying on... cheeky! More fun if we all do it together (in bed)!

Suzanne Hulme

sexy.sue@cwctv.net

Heavens to Betsy, Sexy Sue! We're just going to have to put you under a cold shower, don't you think?

I'm delighted that you printed my letter about THE RETURN OF DRACULA. (Scarlet Street #35) It made the already pleasurable experience of sitting down to read the new issue that much more fun. (The lawyers with whom I eat lunch, who usually discuss criminal cases and sports, were very impressed!)

I thought the dueling WAX articles were a lot of fun. (By the way, I nearly always enjoy the sidebars youse guys include in your longer articles, like Ye Reditor's take on the boy-toy aspects of WEREWOLF OF LONDON. It might've been fun to actually feature a Siskel and Ebertlike discussion between the two of you on the films. Are you legally permitted to be in the same room?)

In any case, the tandem articles brought back lots of memories. The foggy chase in HOUSE OF WAX really is an iconic scene, as much as Larry Talbot's charge in that equally foggy forest in THE WOLF MAN. I remember the first time NY's Channel 11 televised the previously lost MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM, and how I couldn't make my par-

ents understand my excitement at seeing it—then again, they didn't read *Famous Monsters*, did they?

Scarlet Street has brought back the fun I used to have reading Forry's brain-child, long may he wave... and all of you, as well!

Bob Gutowski

Rgutowski@nycds.org

There was some controversy when the San Francisco art commissioner planned to commission a Seattle sculptor to put his work—a "big foot"—permanently on display at the Embarcadero Center. Actually, the commissioner should have used the feet of Lex Barker (*Scarlet Street* #35) as the model and encouraged sculptors all over the world to compete for the prize.

Henry Thompson

Oakland, CA

Uh, Sue... leave the shower running when you're finished, okay?

Just another letter praising you for your work on covering those issues of popular fiction so totally neglected over here in England. (Actually, I'm writing from Scotland, but without meaning to offend the Scots, same difference really!) Unfortunately, the only way for me to get *Scarlet Street* is to get on a plane and fly to London. You're not exactly well represented up here in the frozen wastes of northern Scotland!

Anyway, I wanted to say thank you for the article on the BBC Sherlock Holmes series, which did for radio what Granada did for television. Unfortunately, the television executives and commentators we have over here never really appreciated Granada's Sherlock Holmes series much. It is barely mentioned nowadays when they reflect on the television triumphs of the last millennium (most of what they call great consists of soap operas and hospital programmes) and those detectives

that do get a mention are usually Hercule Poirot or Inspector Morse. Maybe he doesn't get much coverage because he is so taken for granted as a fictional character or maybe because he seems to represent little more than a clever dick in a Victorian setting. We now have a Sherlock Holmes statue in London (finally) and, while the serious Holmes aficionados inevitably gripe and complain that it doesn't look like their hero, at least he now stands where most tourists expect to find him.

Things, though, seem to be looking up. I don't know whether you've already seen it, but we had a splendid one-off programme called MURDER ROOMS: THE DARK BEGINNINGS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES on television recently, with Ian Richardson superb as Dr. Joseph Bell and Iain Lang as Arthur Conan Doyle. It was pure fiction, but proved again that anything related to Sherlock Holmes can work wonderfully if done well. I'd love to hear what you made of it.

You're probably wondering why the hell I've written to you. The truth is, I'm suffering from *Scarlet Street* withdrawal symptoms. I was also curious if you knew anything about the new version of THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES being filmed by Roger Corman. Knowing his shoestring budgets, I hope it won't become THE POODLE OF THE BASKERVILLES. Who's playing Holmes and Watson and the other characters in the story? I would love to know.

Anyway, thanks for a lovely magazine and I hope you manage to reach the icy, windy reaches of northern Scotland some time soon. I will leave you with a terrible joke, which they are fond of telling up here:

Holmes and Watson are on a case and lying one night on a field under the night

Continued on page 9

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Frankly Scarlet



Diabetes! I ought to know better than to hire anybody with a disease!
—Cary Grant, HIS GIRL FRIDAY

In this case, sorry to say, I didn't hire anyone with the disease—I came down with the damn thing myself!

This is by way of explanation as to why *Scarlet Street*'s schedule seemed a little erratic in the past several months. It seemed erratic because it was erratic! (If you failed to notice that it was erratic, then disregard this column—it wasn't erratic!) Although I've been told I have just a dash of diabetes—much like Sister Ingrid Bergman had a touch of TB in *THE BELLS OF ST. MARY'S*—the onset of said dash knocked me for a bit of a loop when I got the diagnosis on the last day of 1999. (It also interfered severely with my champagne consumption at that evening's New Year's Eve party—like, it couldn't have waited a day? One crummy day?) Every cloud has some silver innards, though, and I've finally been forced to start taking off the weight I've been piling on for the past two decades. It will be a leaner but healthier Reditor who greets Scarlet Streeters at such upcoming conventions as Frightvision (March 31–April 2 in Akron, Ohio), Chiller (April 14–16 in Secaucus, New Jersey), The Monster Bash (June 30–

July 2 in Greensburg, Pennsylvania), and the Classic FilmFest (July 28–30 in Arlington, Virginia).

That is, unless, like Sister Ingrid, I'm sent to Arizona for my health. Arizona, you've been warned...!

Hey, gang, I know many of you are intrigued by the inner workings of *Scarlet Street*, so I thought I'd let you in on an inspiring example of the utter gravity and steely-eyed high-mindedness that colors every single moment of our sacred mission. The reworked title page for Michael Mallory's acclaimed Phyllis Kirk interview, pictured to the right, was turned in by managing editor Tom Amorosi even as we raced frantically toward our deadline. Took me a few minutes to decide whether or not to go with it....

The Big News on the Street is the latest addition to the Scarlet Website—message boards! They've been up for about a month and we've been having a fine old time discussing Sherlock Holmes, Universal and Hammer, Tarzan, sexual subtext in *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* and *THE BRIDES OF DRACULA*, Movie-poster collecting, film noir, Karloff and Lugosi, Cushing and Lee, Godzilla and Gorgo, and just about anything else you can name. Such Scarlet Staffers as Ken Hanke, John E. Payne, John "News Hound" Mathews, Dan Clayton, Ross Care, Kevin Shinnick, John F. Black, Michael D. Walker, Tony Strauss, John Brunas, Chris Pustorino, Todd Livingston, Chris Workman, and Tom Amorosi drop by regularly to comment and answer questions, and it's a swell place to find out the latest news about your favorite Magazine of Mystery and Horror. We also have guests, such as the gent who gave the world *THE FIRST NUDIE MUSICAL*, record exec Bruce Kimmel, and Charles Edward Pogue, who



wrote the screenplays for *PSYCHO* III and the remake of *THE FLY*.

So don't delay, as they say. Just sign on at www.scarletstreet.com, click on the Forums button, register (it's fast and free), and join in the fun...

Richard Valley

SCARLET LETTERS

Continued from page 8

sky. Holmes turns to Watson and asks him, "Watson, what do the stars tell you?" The doctor is nonplussed by the question. "Well, Holmes, they tell me that I am only a small figure in the grand scheme of life itself and that, uhm, they shall continue to look down on us long after we are gone." "And what else do they tell you?" asks Holmes. A truly baffled Watson doesn't know what to make of this. "Well, Holmes, they remind me of the futility of our struggles against evil and corruption and that we are all slaves to a higher existence." Silence. Then Watson says cautiously, "What do they tell you, Holmes?" "They tell me that some bastard has stolen our tent!"

Scottish humour. Keep up the good work and regards from a desperate Scots fan.

Tom Etzel
Aberdeen, Scotland

You needn't be desperate, Tom, or journey all the way to London for Scarlet Street. Just

avail yourself of our subscription form and have the Magazine of Mystery and Horror delivered right to you. Wish we could give you some info on Corman's *HOUND*, but it was still mired not in the moor, but in the casting process the last we heard. And we quite agree with you that Sherlock Holmes deserves more respect. If Victorian dicks were good enough for Oscar Wilde, they should be good enough for us!

☺

I perused your feature on *RETURN OF DRACULA* by John Brunas and Richard Valley in SS #35 and, connecting with your references to the cast's association with television, was struck by your failure to credit the producers' (Levy, Gardner, and Laven) greatest contribution to TV: *THE RIFLEMAN* (an episode or two in which William Fawcett appeared, I believe). Your review of *RETURN* was interesting, but the film itself was painfully monotonous to me, and can only be obtusely compared to the vastly superior Hammer *DRACULA* production of the same year.

In *SCARLET LETTERS*, Mr. Angelcyk from Illinois communicated the most memorable remonstrance of Issue #35 in his defense of the (dare I blaspheme?) best of all Frankenstein flicks. I'd seen *FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLF MAN* 10 or more times before I even bought the video, and still cherish it for the atmosphere, Lugosi's intriguing portrayal of the Monster, and especially the unsynopated musical score, which, in my unorthodox opinion, marks the zenith for H. J. Salter. (It's right up there with Herschel Burke Gilbert's theme for *THE RIFLEMAN*, and Miklos Rosza's sublime score for *KING OF KINGS*.)

G. Gilbert
jstnsync@your-net.com

☺

AMERICAN GOTHIC: THE RETURN OF DRACULA was a fascinating article about a very underrated picture. I remember going to see *RETURN* when I was 11 years old. However, I must correct one item in the article.

Continued on page 10

SCARLET LETTERS

Continued from page 9

On page 42, you talk about the haunting background music running through the film, the *Dies Irae*. You say the music comes from the "familiar, doom-laden Black Mass." If by this statement you are referring to Satanism, you are completely off base. The *Dies Irae* was actually an integral part of the old Catholic requiem mass sung at funerals until about 35 years ago. It is a very dreadful, yet beautiful piece of music.

David Brink
Pittsburgh, PA

Just wanna say how much I enjoy your magazine and the "hidden agenda." Along the lines of that agenda, I hope you can locate and print some beefcake shots of Robert Stack from the thirties or forties. I only recently came across a small photo of him and was amazed at his physique and in particular his modern-day abdominals 50 years ago.

Paul Conway
New York, NY

There's a joke lurking in the body of that letter, but we'll be damned if we're going to mention it!

I want to thank you for your fine magazine's recent feature and interviews concerning THE RETURN OF DRACULA, the first Dracula movie I ever saw. (It was as CURSE OF DRACULA, on Baltimore television in 1964.) The suggestive horror of Francis Lederer's hypnotic Dracula cer-

tainly had an impact on me the night I first watched it, a great feat for the typically low-budgeted films of the fifties. To me, this represented genuine horror: a state of apprehension without excessive gore and violence.

The vampire's impersonation of a family's cousin from Europe in a small American town was clearly a forerunner to DARK SHADOWS' Barnabas Collins, who would resort to similar means nine years later. Like Barnabas, "Cousin Bela" had his excuse for being away from the house during the day: his "paintings." With Barnabas, it was "an investment business in Bangor."

While the name "Dracula" was mentioned in the movie's title and dialogue, the vampire was never actually called by that name. It has been stated that Universal still held the film rights to the original character at the time. (After all, Bela Lugosi's caped ghouls were respectively named Mora and Tesla in MGM's MARK OF THE VAMPIRE and Columbia's RETURN OF THE VAMPIRE.)

I highly compliment Lederer for his superb acting ability, though I could not agree with his comments about horror. I might mention that he again played Dracula in "The Devil is Not Mocked," a seventies TV episode of Rod Serling's NIGHT GALLERY. Here, he was clad in the cloak and also sported fangs, and was truly calling himself Dracula.

Thomas Schellenberger
Jefferson, LA

Thanks for showing the feet of Mighty Lex. (Scarlet Street #34) Do you have another shot of him that shows the sole of his bare feet? To artists, this is a great subject. Perhaps your magazine would make the 21st-century artists of all kinds aware of this subject matter. In the forties, it was the legs of Betty Grable, another sex symbol of the 20th century. In the fifties, it was Jane Russell. Now, it is Lex Barker.

L.T. Gray
West Hollywood, CA

Oh, for the love of Lex! Maybe we should just leave that cold shower running, whaddya think?

Have you guys ever considered putting out a series of interview books?

Natalie Trumbell
Boston, MA

Funny you should mention that . . .

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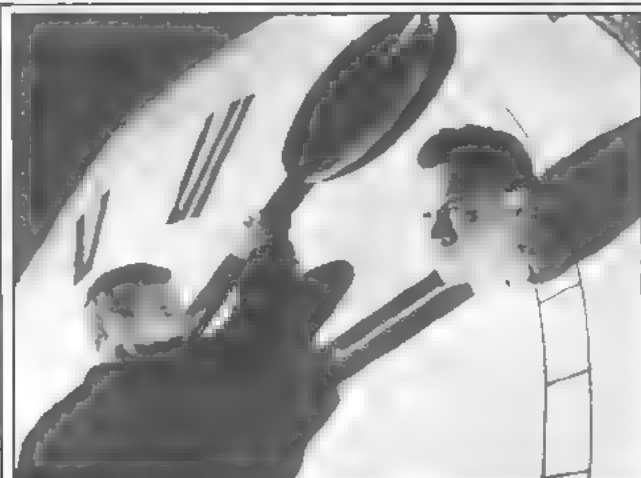
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the NEWS HOUND

The Hound springs from his den once again with a pawful of press releases regarding upcoming media both mysterious and horrific...

Hammer Has Risen from the Grave

A media consortium made up of music, film, and advertising executives has purchased the assets of Hammer Films with the intent of turning the venerable British horror house into a modern multimedia corporation. The holdings of longtime Hammer producer Roy Skeggs were bought out by the new owners, who intend to create new productions—including computer software and Internet content—with the Hammer brand name. So far there's been no announcement regarding Hammer's existing library of fright classics; The Hound hopes the series of fine Anchor Bay DVD releases will continue unabated.

Theatrical Thrills

New Line's supernatural thriller *FREQUENCY* turns up the volume in April, starring Jim Caviezel as a young man who uses a ham radio to contact his dead firefighter dad (Dennis Quaid) 30 years in the past. Also coming in April is *THE CROW: SALVATION* (Dimension), featuring Kirsten Dunst, and Eric Mabius (*CRUEL INTENTIONS*) as Crow #3 Chip Johannessen, former writer/producer on television's *MILLENNIUM*, scripted this sequel.

In May, Tom Cruise returns as superspy Ethan Hunt in *MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE 2* (Paramount). This time around, Hunt hunts for a deadly pathogen that threatens to destroy all chances of further sequels. Anthony Hopkins plays Ethan's new boss. Also on view in theaters in May is Disney's impressive computer-generated Paleolithic adventure *DINOSAUR*.

Future Features

PSYCHO BEACH PARTY, the movie version of Charles Busch's campy stage comedy, body-surfs into theaters in August courtesy of Strand Releasing. Playwright/screenwriter Busch, per his usual, dons drag to portray police Captain Monica Stark, assigned to hunt down psychotic murderess Florence "Chicklet" Forrest, played by Lauren Ambrose of TV's *PARTY OF FIVE*. Other television refugees in the cast of this Hitchcockian beach party pastiche include *TALES OF THE CITY* and *DHARMA & GREG*'s Thomas Gibson, and *BUFFY*'s Nicholas Brendon.

Following on the heels of the memorable 1999 ESP tales *STIR OF ECHOES* and *THE SIXTH SENSE*, Paramount is

preparing their own psychic thriller. *THE GIFT* Sam Raimi directs this story of an Arkansas woman asked to use her preternatural powers to solve a murder. Keanu Reeves, Cate Blanchett, Katie Holmes, and Gary Cole star.

SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE, the upcoming fantasy drama from producer Nicolas Cage's Saturn Films, has had a title change from its original appellation, *BURNED TO LIGHT*. As The Hound reported last time, the film theorizes that German director F.W. Murnau used a real vampire as the star of his 1922 classic *NOSFERATU*. The screenplay for *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* was written by Steven Katz, who did some uncredited script work on Anne Rice's adaptation of *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE* for Warner Bros.



Hammer Films has risen from the grave more times, now, than Basil Rathbone in *THE COMEDY OF TERRORS*, so it remains to be seen if the third-plus time is the charm. Pictured: Hammer's *THE PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES* (1966).

Frankenstein Must Be Unemployed!

After two years and \$10 million, Universal has decided to stop production on its computer-animated *FRANKENSTEIN* film. It seems the top brass decided the subject matter was too dark to earn mainstream cartoon-movie bucks. (When you're adapting Mary Shelley's story about resurrecting a patchwork corpse, you should expect "dark," don'tcha think?)

But, oops, Universal already promised George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic that they'd pay the company \$8 million to create special effects for the Frankentoon. Unless some arrangement can be made, it looks like George has some extra free money to pay for more Jar Jar Binks appearances in the next *STAR WARS*.

Deja Views

Brendan Fraser, Rachel Weisz, and John Hannah return for more sandy swash-

buckling in Universal's *THE MUMMY 2*, which starts shooting this spring in London and Points East. Look for Imhotep to stumble across cinema screens again in May of 2001.

HANNIBAL, Universal's sequel to *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*, brings back Anthony Hopkins as the grisly gourmand Hannibal Lecter. And it looks pretty certain that Julianne Moore will take over as FBI agent Clarice Starling, since Jodie Foster has taken a pass. No word on when production will begin, though.

Those pinning for Pinhead will surely get stuck on *HELLRAISER V: INFERNO* (Dimension). James Remar, Craig Sheffer, and Nicholas Turturro star in this installment, along with Doug Bradley (natch) returning as the spiky Cenobite. Former USC film students Scott Derrickson and Paul Harris Boardman collaborated on the screenplay, with Derrickson directing. This sequel-happy duo also wrote the upcoming *URBAN LEGEND: THE FINAL CUT*, due in August from Columbia.

Jason Voorhees, the ghoul in the goalie mask, returns in New Line's *JASON X*, which starts shooting this spring. This time Jason (Kane Hodder) slashes his way through a post-apocalyptic sci-fi future. Special effects tech James Isaac makes his directing debut; original *FRIDAY THE 13th* director Sean Cunningham serves as producer.

Staging Mister Holmes

As reported last time, a new Sherlockian stage musical is on the horizon: *HOLMES!*, with book and lyrics by Brett Nicholson and music by Hans Vollrath, has entered its final workshop phase and will be presented to the public on May 4-5, 2000, at the Disney Institute in Orlando, Florida.

The original story features Sherlock Holmes, Dr. John Watson, and company matching wits once again with the murderous Professor Moriarty.

The Disney Institute, an educational and performing arts center that is part of Walt Disney World Resort, will host interview sessions with the show's creators and cast immediately after each of the two performances. For more information, visit the show's website at www.holmes-themusical.com, or call 407-938-SHOW.

Dark Shadows Over Broadway

The vampiric Barnabas Collins may soon be belting his baritone across the boards. Dan Curtis, creator of the cult Gothic soap opera *DARK SHADOWS*, and the two

Continued on page 14



TAB: Say, Roddy, have you seen the swell new Discussion Boards on the Scarlet Website? You can sign on and talk about classic Universal Horrors, Hammer Films, Sherlock Holmes, Charlie Chan, Alfred Hitchcock, Tarzan of the Apes, The Thin Man, Jack the Ripper, and just about anything else that comes to mind! Why, heck, you can even talk about sexual subtexts in old pictures . . .

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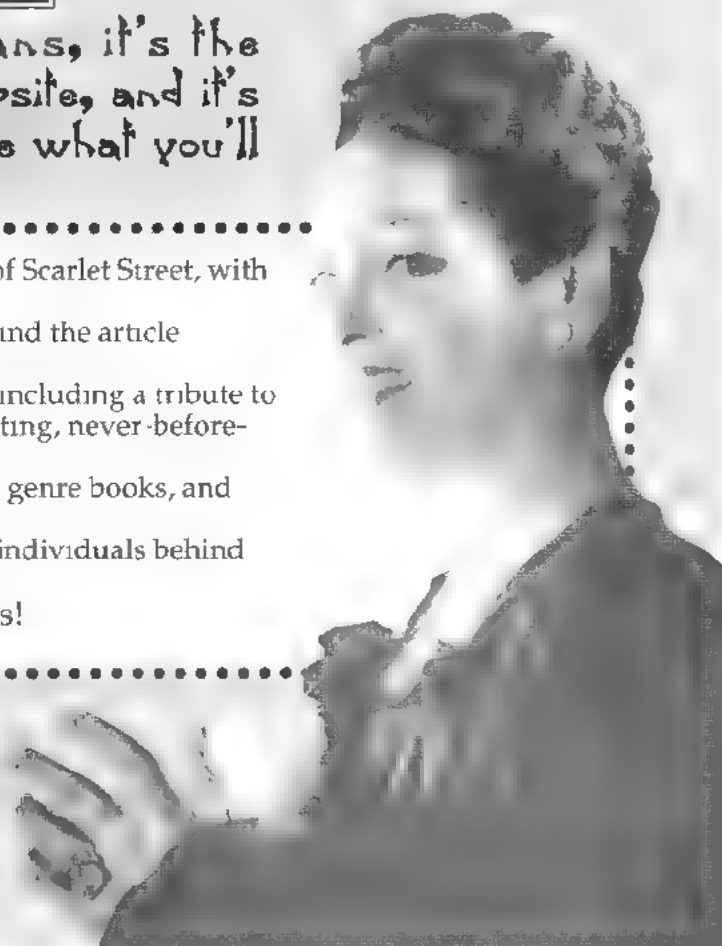
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He's big! He's mean! He's a killing machine—that is, he was at first, and then he became something of a pussycat. A big, mean pussycat. With radioactive breath.

We're talking Godzilla here, that 500-foot-tall monstrosity who first vis-



ited wholesale destruction on Tokyo in 1954's GOJIRA, and later that year was given his American fighting title—GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS—and a name costar in a pre-PERRY MASON Raymond Burr.

That black-and-white, Americanized debut is among the features included in this boxed set of "five rampaging movies" from Simitar Entertainment, the others being the entertaining GODZILLA VERSUS MOTHRA (1964), the outrageous GODZILLA VERSUS MONSTER ZERO (1966), the determinedly childish GODZILLA'S REVENGE (1969), and the rather shoddy TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA (1975). No matter that several of these films, all directed by Ishiro Honda (with Burr's scenes helmed by Terry Morse), are less than stunning examples of Japan's Giant Monster Industry—if you're a Godzilla fan, no explanation is necessary, and if you're not, well, no explanation is possible. (He's sort of like a 50-story Bela Lugosi in that regard.)

Toho's GOJIRA has always been considered far superior to the reworked American release (for one thing, it's 18 minutes longer), but one of the most effective sequences in GODZILLA combines footage of Burr and his fellow interpolated actors with a midnight attack by the great beast on an island village, as a sudden storm fiercely rages. Borrowing a leaf from the Less is More School of Horror Filmmaking, Godzilla is barely glimpsed during this sequence, but his presence is felt from the look of sheer terror on the island's inhabitants, and by Burr's fear and confusion as he seeks

shelter from the storm beneath a billowing tree. (It was a busy year for the beefy actor, when he wasn't running from impossibly large dinosaurs, he was hacking his wife to bits in Hitchcock's REAR WINDOW.) It's refreshing to reacquaint oneself with this (literally) groundbreaking motion picture and find a Godzilla who doesn't fling himself through the air or click his heels when he defeats a fellow gargantuan.

Unfortunately, Zilly does all this and less in GODZILLA VERSUS MONSTER ZERO, which teams him with Rodan (effective in his 1956 debut, but lacking in sufficient personality for the long haul) in an interplanetary battle with the titular Zero (actually Ghidrah the Three-Headed Monster, who made his debut in a 1964 film of the same name, battling Moe, Larry, and—pardon me—Godzilla, Rodan, and Mothra).

Mothra's the heroine of GODZILLA VERSUS MOTHRA, the second best flick in this set, sacrificing herself to save Japan from the Big G, but leaving behind a soon-to-hatch giant egg to finish the job.

Simitar (that's the DVD company, not another big fella) offers reasonably good transfers of these titles, with all but TERROR OF MECHAGODZILLA in both full screen and letterboxed formats, and tosses in such fun extras as an interactive trivia game, a video art gallery, a trailer collection, a documentary, screen savers, and a Raymond Burr biography. Godzilla watchers will rejoice, and that's all that really matters, isn't it, G-fans...?

—Drew Sullivan

NEWSHOUND

Continued from page 12

films and revival TV series that followed, has plans to concoct a musical stage version of his durably creepy creation.

Curtis, who freely admits to having no theater experience, will be joined by his longtime collaborator Bob Cobert as composer. Cobert has written virtually all the background scores for Curtis' film and TV productions, but, like Curtis, has no stage experience either.

The ringer in this enterprise is Rupert Holmes, who won five Tony Awards for THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD in 1986 (and is a devoted reader of *Scarlet Street*). Holmes will write the show's lyrics and coauthor the book with Curtis.

Curtis says the Hartford Stage Company in Connecticut has expressed interest in premiering the musical. What's next—MY FAIR KOLCHAK?

Television Terrors

PBS's MYSTERY series presents the new two-part drama MURDER ROOMS: THE DARK BEGINNINGS OF SHERLOCK

HOLMES on May 18 and 25. An intriguing combination of fiction and fact, the plot concerns Dr. Joseph Bell—the real-life Edinburgh physician who was Arthur Conan Doyle's inspiration for Sherlock Holmes—and his pursuit of a Victorian serial killer. Assisting Bell in a Watsonian capacity is the young Conan Doyle himself. Distinguished former Holmes portrayer Ian Richardson plays Dr. Bell; Robin Laing, featured recently in CADFAEL, portrays Conan Doyle.

The Lone Gunman, the paranoid trio of conspiracy hounds who periodically assist Agent Fox Mulder in THE X-FILES, may get their own television series. The Fox network has asked Chris Carter to develop the new show, possibly as a replacement for his perennial Sunday night smash if it ends its run after its current seventh season.

The Showtime premium cable network is considering yet another of their successful anthology series. THIS WAY COMES, a planned omnibus of fantasy and sci-fi stories, will adapt tales by top authors in the field. Real-life literary an-

cestor Edgar Allan Poe IV is scheduled to serve as the program's host.

Suave adventurer Simon Templar may return this fall in a revival of THE SAINT on the UPN network. John McTiernan, director of the feature film DIE HARD, will serve as executive producer for the tentative project.

The Home Video Vault

STAR WARS EPISODE ONE: THE PHANTOM MENACE will be released on VHS (but not DVD) in April. Pan-and-scan editions in English or Spanish are available for \$24.98. A "Collector's Set" (\$39.98) includes the letterboxed version, a documentary on the production, a collector's book, and "an authentic 35mm single frame from the movie."

Two feature-length episodes of the fabulous POIROT series starring David Suchet are about to become available on DVD: "Death in the Clouds" and "The ABC Murders." These are really first-class productions, on a par with the Jeremy Brett Sherlock Holmes series and the Miss Marple TV films with Joan Hick-



Archie Goodwin (Tim Hutton) and Nero Wolfe (Maury Chaykin) interrogate a pint-sized client in A&E's **THE GOLDEN SPIDERS**, the first of what will hopefully be a long series of Rex Stout adaptations.

son—and when are they going to make their DVD debuts?

This April, Paramount will release **STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK** on DVD before **STAR TREK I** and **II** strangely enough. Paramount will also be releasing episodes of **STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION** on DVD starting this summer.

Upcoming DVD releases: the **HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL** remake (Warner), **END OF DAYS** (Universal), and David Lynch's **BLUE VELVET** (MGM) appear in April; **THE GREEN MILE** (Warner), Tim Burton's **SLEEPY HOLLOW** (Paramount), and the James Bond opus **THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH** (MGM) will be available in May.

Also in May, fans will spy special DVD editions from MGM of James Bond epics **DR. NO**, **ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE**, **THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN**, and **THE SPY WHO LOVED ME**.

Report From the Two Kens

Scarlet Street associate editor (and author of the 1984 book *Ken Russell's Films*) Ken Hanke checks in with this report of a recent chat with Ken Russell:

"Having heard rumors of a new Ken Russell film in the works—his off-the-wall adaptation of Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher,' for which I have read an early version of the script ('There've been 10 rewrites since then,' Russell told me). I called up the Great Man to get the scoop, and, yes, the film is indeed a go. Now titled **THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER**, it's an underground production, being shot in three weeks on tape, and starring Russell's old cinematic comrade Roger Daltrey, with Ken himself playing the insane Dr. Caligari! The project came about after Russell (in a somewhat fortified state) made an impassioned speech on TV against the state of the British film industry. A couple of girls working in underground film contacted him afterwards and from that meeting came this film. And it really is underground filmmaking. Sez Russell 'We've actually been going up to people and asking if they would like to be in a

film. And when it's done, we may march on the Houses of Parliament.' At 72 Ken Russell shows very little sign of settling down."

More Stuff

The wonderful new series of compact discs, "The Hammer Film Music Collection," continues on a monthly basis with the original soundtrack releases **TWINS OF EVIL**, **TASTE THE**

BLOOD OF DRACULA, **THE DEVIL RIDES OUT**, and **THE VAMPIRE LOVERS**, the latter containing well over an hour of Harry Robinson's chilling music. New compilation releases include **THE FRANKENSTEIN COLLECTION**, featuring original cues from **FRANKENSTEIN MUST BE DESTROYED** and **MONSTER FROM HELL**, and **HAMMER HORROR, VOLUME THREE**. The first four releases are still available from *Scarlet Street*, check out the back cover.

British author, interviewer, and Hammer Films expert Jonathan Sothcott turns his attention to Hammer's rival in *The Studio That Dripped Blood: The Amicus Story* (Stray Cat Publishing/Ebony Media, \$32). All the key players from Amicus' 20-year history are interviewed in this fully illustrated 164-page book available in bookstores in April.

It's nice to see scientists with a sense of humor. *Scarlet Street* illustrator and science buff John E. Payne reports that a 300-million-year-old fossil animal from Carboniferous strata in East Kirkton, Scotland has been officially named "Eucritta melanolimnites," which is technical Greek for "Creature from the Black Lagoon."

Gone, but never to be forgotten: artists Pat Boyette, Gil Kane, Don Martin, and Charles Schulz, author and film curator James Card, science fiction author A. E. van Vogt; animator Marc Davis; screenwriters Jeffrey Boam and Michael McDowell; producers Sam Jaffe and Bernard Smith; directors Robert Bresson, Riccardo Freda, Barry Mahon, John Newland, Mike Ockrent, Irving Rapper, and Roger Vadim; and actors Rex Allen, Arthur Batandes, Patrick Bedford, Ed Bryce, Helena Carter, Marguerite Churchill, Chuck Courtney, Frances Drake, Jester Hairston, Shirley Hemphill, Peter Jeffrey, Todd Karns, Mabel King, Hedy Lamarr, Desmond Llewelyn, Pupella Maggio, Clayton Moore, Dick Peabody, Gene Rayburn, Fran Ryan, Jim Varney, and Harold "Bouncy" Wertz of **OUR GANG**.

Send The Hound your questions, comments and compliments via e-mail to TheNewsHound@yahoo.com.



The EDGAR G. ULMER COLLECTION



Exclusively on
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Stylishly directed by acclaimed filmmaker Edgar Ulmer, this classic horror thriller has been too long misrepresented by poor quality public domain copies. This definitive edition has been digitally mastered from a newly restored 35mm preservation positive. This collector's edition DVD sure to be a must-have item for all horror fans, also includes never-before-seen color footage!



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Ulmer's modern take on the classic horror tale stars John Agar and Gloria Talbott. Digitally restored from the studio masters, this collector's edition also features behind-the-scenes interviews, the original trailer, and a collection of rare stills.

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SCREEN...



and Screen AGAIN!

Scarlet Street's DVD and Laser Review

DRACULA—PRINCE OF DARKNESS

Anchor Bay
DVD, \$29.99

The quaint village of Carlsbad, sequestered in the expansive Carpathian mountains beckons with myriad opportunities for travel, sightseeing, hiking, and mountain climbing—a wholesome environment that conceals a dormant evil awaiting rebirth. Hammer's second Dracula entry, *DRACULA: PRINCE OF DARKNESS* (1966), dispatches British vacationers Charles Kent (Francis Matthews) and his brother Alan (Charles Tingwell), accompanied by their wives Diana (Suzan Farmer) and Helen (Barbara Shelley) respectively, on such an ill-fated journey. Alan unwittingly provides the fodder for the gory resurrection of Count Dracula (Christopher Lee). The vampire wastes no time in corrupting Helen before setting his bloodshot sights on Diana. Charles finally defeats Dracula with the aid of a priest, Father Shandor (Andrew Keir).

Always a seldom seen menace, the Count is heard even less in this treatment. Other than one elongated hiss, Lee is content to employ his commanding stature to convey the character's presence

without the use of dialogue. The vampire is rather dependent on human underlings, his castle caretaker, Klove (Philip Latham), engineers his transformation from dust into matter, while the Renfield-like bookbinder Ludwig (Thorley Walters) in a fly-consuming performance) is compelled to invite Dracula to cross the threshold of Shandor's monastery.

The latter plot detail demonstrates attention to the traditional vampire lore. Many cinematic efforts simply enable the Count to materialize wherever and whenever he pleases. The film's climax, however, makes use of Father Shandor's pronouncement that running water can drown the monster. Perhaps the filmmakers were attempting to avoid genre clichés, but that's a "fact" I've never seen substantiated by scholars. Overall, the production provides the occasional chill, but rarely equals its predecessor, *HORROR OF DRACULA* (1958). Oddly, it's never as suspenseful as Hammer's previous, non-Lee vampiric exercises, *THE BRIDES OF DRACULA* (1963) and *KISS OF THE VAMPIRE* (1963).

The transfer to DVD is fine for the most part. The Techniscope image is displayed in the proper 2.35:1 aspect ratio, restoring compositional integrity and allowing Bernard Robinson's sets to breathe. The color hues tend toward brown, and aren't quite as robust as they appear in the accompanying trailer preview, but they are consistently rendered and the source material is basically free of artifacts and speckling. My review copy evidenced two brief audio "pops," but otherwise the monaural soundtrack is pleasing for a film of this vintage and budget.

DRACULA: PRINCE OF DARKNESS can also be experi-

enced with an audio commentary track featuring leads Christopher Lee, Francis Matthews, Barbara Shelley, and Suzan Farmer. They share much laughter while reminiscing about the creation of the film. In fact, their conviviality provides the atmosphere of a bull session rather than a dry, scholarly lecture. Lee occasionally assumes center stage, contrasting Bram Stoker's creation with his own interpretation of the central role. He also praises director Terence Fisher's willingness to experiment, citing his own preference to delete the vampire's pedestrian dialogue. Shelley admits that her screams were actually supplied by costar Farmer, and humorously describes the difficulty of speaking normally while wearing fangs. She goes on to relate that she actually swallowed one of her fangs while shooting her gruesome staking scene! The commentary isn't always scene specific, as Lee interjects a variety of related subjects—but when he's discussing matters such as the New York premiere of *HORROR OF DRACULA*, it's doubtful that anyone will object to his tangents.

There are visual supplements to be had as well. Shades of *laserdisc*, it is necessary to flip the platter over to Side Two to access them. Two theatrical trailers are lurking, one stand-alone and one combo spot featuring the film's original co-feature, *THE PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES*. (The combo promotes giveaway gimmicks "Dracula fangs for the boys, Zombie eyes for the girls.") There is also several minutes of 8mm home-movie footage photographed by Matthews' brother Paul Shelley, that contains behind-the-scenes glimpses of the staging of Dracula's watery demise.

Additionally, an episode of the British 1990 TV series *THE WORLD OF HAMMER*, entitled "Dracula and The Undead," features extended sequences from several examples of the studio's vampire output. The program resembles a picture book filled with nostalgic images, but light on text. I wish that the disc's producers had included video footage of the cast's reunion—a photograph of the four actors was circulated when they first reunited to record their commentary track for the original laserdisc.

—John F. Black

BLITHE SPIRIT Image Entertainment DVD, \$24.99

The mid-forties were a very busy time for ghosts and spirits in the cinema. The enormous popularity of *THE GHOST GOES WEST* (1936) and *TOPPER* (1937) kicked off a slew of comedies featuring ectoplasmic entities. With the exception of *THE UNINVITED* (1944), the afterlife was shown in a happy and carefree light, a comfort for the many families suffering from the casualties of World War II. In addition to *THE UNINVITED*, 1944 alone saw the release of *A GUY NAMED JOE*, *THE CANTERVILLE GHOST*, *GHOST CATCHERS*, *HALFWAY HOUSE*, and *A PLACE OF ONE'S OWN*. Even the



ZIEGFELD FOLLIES was introduced by the spirit of Ziegfeld!

Noel Coward's ghost-filmed stage play BLITHE SPIRIT had been a huge hit on the London and Broadway stages and it was only natural for the movies to pursue the hot property. Coward had already teamed with director David Lean on IN WHICH WE SERVE (1942) and THIS HAPPY BREED (1944), and BLITHE SPIRIT would be their third collaboration and first comedy (The liner notes on the DVD mistakenly call BLITHE SPIRIT Lean's only comedy, ignoring 1953's enchanting HOBSON'S CHOICE.) The following year would produce BRIEF ENCOUNTER, recently awarded the number two spot on the British Film Institute's Best British Films list.

BLITHE SPIRIT is very much in the whimsical vein of Thorne Smith's TOPPER, with its sexually active spirits and very nonchalant attitude toward death. Researching spiritualism for his new book, Charles Condomine invites medium Madame Arcati to hold an after-dinner seance so that he can observe (and later poke fun of) her act. Unfortunately, the seance works all too well, and the ghost of his first wife, Elvira, appears (only to him) and refuses to leave. His current wife, Ruth, believes him to be first drunk and later insane, until Elvira's existence is proven. Then it is a battle between Elvira's lust for Charles and Ruth's desire to rid her household of the unwanted ghost.

In addition to Coward's sharply written dialogue and Lean's excellent direction, BLITHE SPIRIT benefits from the deft performances of Rex Harrison (who would later become "spiritual" himself in 1947's THE GHOST AND MRS. MUIR) as Charles, Constance Cummings as the beleaguered Ruth, and Kay Hammond as the libidinous Elvira. While these three actors give excellent performances individually, their onscreen chemistry is never really convincing, allowing for some very interesting readings of the text (Try envisioning Charles as a gay man who is completely content to be rid of his wives.) The shining star of BLITHE SPIRIT is far and away the glorious Margaret Rutherford as Madame Arcati. Known best for her portrayal of Miss Marple in the sixties film series (a role so popular that Agatha Christie grudgingly acknowledged Rutherford by dedicating *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* to her) the actress steals every scene in which she appears. BLITHE SPIRIT positively shines when Rutherford is on screen and her every line is filled with glorious innuendo and comedic inflection. Her Arcati can easily be placed alongside Ernest Thesiger's Horace Fenn and Dr. Pretorius as the most memorable eccentrics of the fantastic film genre.

The DVD release of BLITHE SPIRIT should be a cause for celebration for fans of the genre and David Lean, but Image's disc is nothing to celebrate. A no-frills release (movie only, 13 chapters), the source print is grainy and faded, taking away

from Ronald Neame's Technicolor photography and the Oscar-winning special effects. The green ghosts with bright red lips and nails appear almost grey. The sound is in its original mono, but is so muffled that many lines are unintelligible. On top of the source print problems, the disc contains several instances of digital dropout and frame freezing, indicating a poor digital transfer. BLITHE SPIRIT is a light, fun, and highly enjoyable romp. It isn't a masterpiece, but it deserves much more than it was given on this very shoddy release.

Michael Drame



STAR TREK

Paramount Home Video

ONE: "Where No Man Has Gone Before," "The Corbomite Maneuver"

TWO: "Mudd's Women," "The Enemy Within"

THREE: "The Man Trap," "The Naked Time"

FOUR: "Charlie X," "Balance of Terror"

FIVE: "What Are Little Girls Made Of," "Dagger of the Mind"

DVD, \$19.99 each

"How many times can you watch those damn things?" my mother would say, as I ate dinner from a folding table while Channel 11 ran its nightly 6PM STAR TREK episode. A good question, even in the mid-seventies when she asked it. Even then I had seen every original episode dozens of times in syndication, could name which episode it was by the first scene of the teaser (sometimes before the fade-in was finished), and recite dialogue as though I was singing a favorite song. I like to think I'm not quite so pathetic as an adult, but I've never tired of what the kiddies now refer to as CLASSIC TREK (and I refer to as REAL TREK) and I can't imagine ever doing so.

So! After decades of watching it on local TV, rediscovering lost scenes in the video releases, and getting inside perspectives on the Sci-Fi Channel's special editions, we now have the treat of experiencing the original STAR TREK anew yet again—on DVD. I wanted to see what the fuss was all about right off, so the first thing I did was load up the same episode in the DVD player and the VHS deck. After a somewhat anal period of attempting to sync the playback to the same instant, I settled back and flipped the video selector between the two sources. I can't say that I expected much of an improvement over VHS considering the original source

was a 30-year-old TV show shot in 16mm. Everyone has been expounding on the astonishing quality of the new discs, which have been remastered and digitally enhanced with the sound remixed for Dolby Digital 5.1 surround, but I always maintain a healthy skepticism to avoid disappointment. Nevertheless, *Scarlet Street's* official review of the picture quality can best be expressed by repeating my exclamation on first viewing: "Holy cow! This is incredible!"

How sharp is the picture? You can see the fabric texture in the uniforms and every pore on every face. You can see when Spock needs a shave. It boggles the mind that this much detail even existed on the original film! Why, you can clearly read the inscription on the gravestone Gary Macneil makes for Kirk in "Where No Man Has Gone Before." When Joe Torrouin threatens Sulu and Riley with a butter knife in "The Naked Time," you can almost read the manufacturer's trademark on the blade. In "Mudd's Women," you can see Roger C. Carmel's neck hair too clearly! (All technology has a down side.) "Mudd's Women" must have presented a particular challenge for the digital enhancers; it can't be easy to sharpen a show that largely consists of women shot through gauze!

Each disc holds two episodes for roughly the same price as a single episode on VHS. Upon loading, a split screen appears showing a graphic for each episode (These graphics were apparently chosen by someone with some TREK savvy and a sense of humor—for instance, "The Enemy Within" is represented by that ridiculous little alien poodle with the horn on its head.) Once you've chosen the episode, the next menu features playback of the show, an option for English subtitles, the original broadcast preview trailer ("next voyage!"), and a scene selection menu (used to call them chapter stops back in the old laserdisc days) that let you pick up the story at six or seven places.

I'll forego superlatives such as "It looks like *VDI*!" and "It's like watching them for the first time!"—oh drat, I just used them. Honestly, you'll be bowled over by the



picture and sound quality. Believe me, I'm more than tempted to buy the whole series in this format—and then I can live in fear of when the next format comes out.

John E. Payne

I SAW WHAT YOU DID

Anchor Bay

DVD, \$24.98

Showman Willam Castle famous for such films as *HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL* (1959) and *THE TINCLER* (1959), produced and directed this 1965 chiller about three girls who, temporarily free of their parents, spend an evening pranking. Unfortunately, they dial up a sadistic killer (John Ireland) proclaiming, "I saw what you did, and I know who you are." Believing him to be a sexy swinger who wants a date, they decide to see what he looks like, only to encounter his jealous neighbor, played by Joan Crawford. She sends them scurrying away, but not before she's taken the car's registration, complete with a name and address by which Ireland can find them. Thus begins a night of horror for two of the girls as they are menaced by the killer at their parents' country estate.

Castle was hardly a great director, but his films did have a certain flair for hype, as evidenced by the disc's biography. The Special World Premiere Announcement contained on the disc also bears this out. Most of Castle's films were accompanied by theater gimmicks such as skeletons flying over audiences' heads (*Emergo!*) or seats wired to emit electric shocks in time with frightening events happening on-screen (*Perceptio!*). With *I SAW WHAT YOU DID*, Castle had special sections for frightened viewers in which they could belt themselves into their seats. *I SAW WHAT YOU DID* is pretty dated and derivative, but with a certain charm all its own. The opening shots, complete with bouncy musical cues and stagebound sets generally hidden in fog, almost make the movie appear to be a fifties sitcom in the style of *LEAVE IT TO BEAVER*. And that's part of the problem here: Castle doesn't know if he wants the movie to be a fun, albeit childish, adventure, or a violent and adult feature. The film therefore becomes divided, trying to please two very different audiences simultaneously but never really succeeding with either one. That's not to say the film is terrible, it isn't. As a matter of fact, at 82 minutes it moves rather quickly, setting up the audience in an almost discerning Hitchcockian manner but without the artistic touches. But Castle was no Hitchcock, no matter how hard he tried.

The Universal print used for this DVD is excellent. There's nary a scratch on it. Plus the disc offers the theatrical trailer and several bios, including ones for Crawford and Castle. These bios are not only well-written but witty as well. An insert with the list of chapters recreates the original movie poster on the reverse side.

—Chris Workman



THE CAT AND THE CANARY

Image Entertainment

DVD, \$24.95

I still remember the long tapestries waving in the draft along the dark, dusty hallway—the badly scratched, barely discernible image flickering across a 13-inch black-and-white television screen. That was my first experience viewing Paul Lenti's 1927 masterpiece *THE CAT AND THE CANARY*. What a difference 20 years and new technology make!

The film, based on John Willard's play of the same name, concerns the last will and testament of the late Cyrus West, a millionaire whose relatives believed him to be insane. Laura LaPlante plays Annabelle West, the young heiress-to-be, who will inherit the entire fortune if she can meet but one condition of the will: be judged sane by the family doctor. Sounds simple. That is, until the executor of the estate, Mr. Crosby (Tully Marshall), is killed just as he is about to reveal the name of the second to inherit, should Annabelle not be considered fit.

Creighton Hale adds comedic jitters as Paul Jones, a childhood friend (and cousin) of Annabelle's who still has a crush on her. Arthur Edmund Carewe gets scant screen time as Harry Blythe. Interestingly, Carewe also appeared in the similarly themed film *THE GHOST BREAKER* (1922) which was successfully remade in 1940 for Bob Hope (as was *CAT AND THE CANARY* in 1939). Rounding out the cast are Forrest Stanley, Gertrude Astor, Flora Finch, and Martha Mattox, the last as housekeeper Mummy Pleasant,



a distinctly inaccurate namesake if ever there was one.

From the opening credit sequence of a gloved hand brushing away dusty cobwebs to the surprise unmasking of the villain, this mystery/comedy has been restored in more ways than one. Not only has the original scene tinting been added, but the original musical score was found and newly recorded. Several scenes run longer than in the many poor-quality dups in circulation, previously missing title cards are in place, and best of all, the scene revealing Mr. Crosby's hidden body is intact. David Shepard of Film Preservation Associates produced the film for laserdisc in 1997 and this DVD release is equally impressive. Shepard is one of the top film preservationists in the world, specializing in providing the public with incredible restorations of such silent classics as *Les Vampires* (1915), *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE* (1920), and *THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA* (1925). Once again he delivers more than your money's worth, adding the 1920 Harold Lloyd comedy short *HAUNTED SPOOKS* as a special bonus.

While many a play and film has used an old creaky mansion as its setting, *THE CAT AND THE CANARY* is the most famous. John Willard himself helmed a 1930 remake, *THE CAT CREEPS*. Unfortunately, neither this remake nor the Bob Hope version is available in a home-video format, serving to point up how fortunate we are to have this carefully preserved silent classic.

—Michael D. Walker

BUCK PRIVATES IN THE NAVY

BUCK PRIVATES COME HOME IN THE FOREIGN LEGION

Image Entertainment

DVD BUCK PRIVATES \$29.99,

others \$24.99

In his insightful study of fifties science-fiction films, *Keep Watching the Skies!* (1982), Bill Warren writes that "Lou Costello may be the only great screen clown

whose appeal is almost entirely to children. If you didn't love Abbott and Costello while a child, you never will, if you did, it's likely you always will." I am a living testimonial to this statement.

I inherited my affection for the team from my parents, first-generation Abbott and Costello fans who had enjoyed the team's antics on the big screen. They passed their love for the duo on to me with help from WDRB-TV in Louisville, which for years ran an A&C picture every Sunday at noon.

One of my fondest childhood memories is of sitting cross-legged on our living-room floor in front of our console television, watching *BUCK PRIVATES*. My father, nursing a broken rib he had suffered in a minor car accident, sat down on the couch to watch the film with me. Throughout the course of the movie, the room filled with the sounds of his happy agony, as he chortled helplessly even though laughter made his broken rib ache.

badly. Whenever I watch an A&C comedy, I hear my father's laughter echoing across the years.

I've always felt that A&C's very best films were their service comedies, which, with the exception of *KEEP 'EM FLYING* (1941), are now available on DVD via Image Entertainment. The team's series of "Meet the Monsters" pictures may be more popular, but Bud and Lou were more consistently in top form during these four movies than during any other subset of their filmography.

Service comedies date back at least as far as Charles Chaplin's *SHOULDER ARMS* (1914). Virtually every great comedy team made at least one such film, including Laurel and Hardy (1939's *FLYING DEUCES*), Martin and Lewis (1950's *AT WAR WITH THE ARMY*), The Three Stooges (numerous shorts), and even The Marx Brothers (if you count 1933's *DUCK SOUP*). The arch conservatism and stringent discipline of military life is so effective a backdrop for comic lunacy that service comedies remain popular (1981's *STRIPEs*), though not always very good (1995's *MAJOR PAYNE*).

So it's probably no coincidence, then, that the team's breakthrough film *BUCK PRIVATES* (1941), put the boys in uniform. Bud and Lou play Slicker Smith and Herbie Brown, respectively, a couple of two-bit con men who join the army to escape Sgt. Collins of the NYPD (Nat Pendleton). To the duo's dismay, Slicker and Herbie's drill instructor turns out to be the very same Sgt. Collins (apparently a reservist)! Meanwhile, a romantic triangle develops between spoiled playboy Randolph Parker III (Lee Bowman), his former valet Bob Martin (Alan Curtis), and a young "camp hostess," Judy Gray (Jane Frazee).

The film deftly juggles its comedic and romantic scenes, as well as several musical numbers featuring The Andrews Sisters (including "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy"). *BUCK PRIVATES* is one of those rare classic comedies which is enhanced, rather than diminished, by its musical interludes. All the Sisters' numbers are catchy, and one ("You're a Lucky Fellow, Mr. Smith") provides a lively motif that's reprised throughout the picture.

Nevertheless, the film's real strength is its abundance of Abbott and Costello routines. The famous drill routine, the "dice game," the boxing scene, and others rank among the best loved of all the team's material. Bud and Lou performed these routines countless times in burlesque, and would perform them again and again in later films, on their TV show, and in personal appearances. The best may well be the dice game. In this scene, Herbie asks Slicker to teach him how to play "dice." Slicker, with dollar signs in his eyes, invites his friend to join a crap game. When Herbie wins time and time again, while employing craps lingo such as "fade that" and "let it ride," Slicker realizes he's been duped. In yet another delightful scene, Costello sings a ditty titled "When Private Brown Becomes a Cap-

tain" and rumbas with Shemp Howard, cast as the company's cook.

The comedy is delivered with a hefty dollop of WWII sloganeering. The team virtually disappears during the film's finale, when Randolph and Bob put their differences aside to help win an important military exercise. And although the musical numbers are all good, there's probably at least one too many of them (a half-dozen in all, not counting reprises). Still, *BUCK PRIVATES* ranks among the most satisfying films of the team's career, alongside *HOLD THAT GHOST* (1941) and *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN* (1948). The picture was an unqualified smash. Based on this film alone, Abbott and Costello catapulted to third place on the list of box-office champs for the year.

The runaway success of *BUCK PRIVATES* made studio execs reconsider the team's planned followup, *HOLD THAT GHOST*. That picture was temporarily shelved so that Bud and Lou could appear in another feature similar to *BUCK PRIVATES*. This was *IN THE NAVY* (also 1941), a blatant retread of the prior film. Virtually the entire crew of *BUCK PRIVATES* was retained, including director Arthur Lubin and coscreenwriter Arthur T. Horman. The film even opens with the same music ("You're a Lucky Fellow, Mr. Smith") and features Bud and Lou running a "BUCK PRIVATES" banner up a flagpole!

Unfortunately, Abbott and Costello themselves are the only members of the creative team who perform as capably in *IN THE NAVY* as in *BUCK PRIVATES*. The team performs another selection of now-classic routines, this time as Smokey Adams and Pomeroy Watson, but the plot surrounding them meanders pointlessly. Again, the boys are menaced by a superior officer, this time Dynamite Dugan (Dick Foran), but Foran is out of his element as the heavy. (He was far better in a

light comic performance as the lead in *HORROR ISLAND*, released the same year.) The Andrews Sisters return, and are even integrated into the story, but are left without a single memorable number to perform. Naturally there's a romantic subplot, this time involving an unhappy crooner (Dick Powell) who joins the navy to escape the rigors of fame and a young reporter (Claire Dodd) out to expose him. Unfortunately, the situation is contrived and Powell and Dodd are uninteresting.

Whatever else is wrong with the picture, Abbott and Costello are in superb form. Clearly exuberant over their newfound stardom, they provide a host of hilarious moments, including their classic shell-game routine. Two sequences stand out above the rest. One involves Pomeroy trying to climb into his hammock. The pratfalls that result ably showcase Lou Costello's deceptive grace with physical comedy. In the other highlight, Pomeroy proves to Smokey, through division, multiplication, and addition, that seven times 13 equals 28!

Following *KEEP 'EM FLYING*, the team returned to the service comedy six years later with *BUCK PRIVATES COME HOME* (1947). This movie came in the middle of one of Abbott and Costello's most creative periods. Faced with fading popularity, the team branched out and discarded their usual formula for *LITTLE GIANT* (1946), *THE TIME OF THEIR LIVES* (1946), this picture, and *THE WISTFUL WIDOW OF WAGON GAP* (1947). Only *BUCK PRIVATES COME HOME* hit it big at the box office, but many fans now consider these films among the team's best.

BUCK PRIVATES COME HOME, it's worth noting, is the only sequel the team ever made. Abbott and Costello reprise their roles as Slicker and Herbie (though Bud is inexplicably referred to as Smitty) and Pendleton returns as their nemesis, Sgt. Collins. The movie opens with five



minutes of clips from the original, including the entire drill routine. Smitty and Herbie get discharged from the army. Herbie smuggles a young refugee, Evey (Beverly Simmons), home from France in his duffle bag, but is forced by cold-hearted Collins to turn the child over to immigration services. Herbie's heartsick behavior at the loss of Evey gives Costello a chance to prove he was a better actor than generally considered. (He also displayed his dramatic ability in *THE TIME OF THEIR LIVES* and *LITTLE GIANT*.)

Evey escapes deportation and rushes back to Herbie, but he and Smitty must find a job if they hope to adopt the little girl. They see their chance in Bill Gregory (Tom Brown), who needs their assistance to launch his plan to build and drive midget race cars. They are doggedly pursued by Collins, who has returned to his day job as a beat cop.

The film lacks the wealth of classic burlesque routines that were the strength of the original, but it's rich in effective sight gags, including the film's *tour de force* comic finale. Herbie takes the wheel of Gregory's racer and leads Collins and the rest of the police force on a madcap motor chase. In his book *Movie Comedy Teams* (1970), Leonard Maltin called this masterful sequence "one of the funniest the team ever did."

If *BUCK PRIVATES COME HOME* cannot be counted among the team's elite works, it's on a distinguished second tier, which also includes *THE TIME OF THEIR LIVES*, *WHO DONE IT?* (1942), and *PAR-DO-N MY SARONG* (1942).

(An oddity worth noting: Keen-eyed viewers will notice, in the background of the scene in which Collins arrives at Slicker and Herbie's bus-converted into a house, a *DEAD OF NIGHT* lobby card hangs in clear view! Since this 1945 film was pre-*MEEIS FRANKENSTEIN*, the team was not yet linked with horror, and *DEAD OF NIGHT* wasn't even a Universal film. Curiouser and curiouseer.)

The team would make a final service comedy *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO IN THE FOREIGN LEGION* (1950). Though it suffers badly in comparison with the other films considered here, *FOREIGN LEGION* remains acceptable late-stage A&C. Bud Jones (Abbott) and Lou Hotchkiss (Costello) are wrestling managers who pursue wayward wrestler Abdullah (Wee Willie Davis) to his home and get duped into joining the French Foreign Legion. (Real-life wrestlers Davis and Tor Johnson grapple in one sequence.) This time around, the duo's cohearted sergeant (Walter Slezak) really is a villain. He's an informant for a band of Arab brigands who menace the legionnaires.

The whole business is predictable, but *FOREIGN LEGION* is the only service comedy in which the team actually see any military action. And the proceedings include a few wonderful moments, such as when Lou complains to the sergeant about his machine gun after accidentally showering the camp with bullets. "That's

a dangerous thing to have in the army—someone could get killed!" In another bright spot, Lou suffers a series of hilarious mirages while lost in the desert. He thinks he sees a oasis, an ice cream stand, and a wisecracking paperboy, among other things.

All four discs boast the excellent transfer quality fans have come to expect from Image. The source print of *IN THE NAVY* is just a shade dark, but the other three are pristine. The only disappointment is that none of these DVDs include any bonus features, except a menu screen and chapter list. We can only assume that *BUCK PRIVATES* lists for five bucks more than the other three simply because it's the most popular film of the quartet, since that disc includes no additional features, either.

Mark Clark

JACK BE NIMBLE Image Entertainment DVD, \$19.99

Writer/director Garth Maxwell's 1992 feature-film debut is an extremely odd, disturbing, and not exactly pleasant work that seems even more disturbing because it's so well done that it's not easy to shake—even long after it's over. It is also not an especially easy film to pigeonhole, which perhaps explains—despite the box-office insurance of a name actor, Alexis Arquette (have the Arquettes officially outdistanced the Baldwins in sheer number yet, and can we hope for a grudge match?)—why the film was not a commercial success, and only led to Maxwell helming some XENA and HERCULES TV shows in its wake. It's a sort of a horror film—there are certainly echoes of DePama's *CARRIE* (1976) toward the climax and the title character's wonderful hypnotism gizmo clearly owes a debt to the "Synchronizer" from John Boorman's *EXORCIST II: THE HERETIC* (1977), while other aspects of the film recall Tobe Hooper's *TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSacre* (1974). Nevertheless, it would be doing *JACK BE NIMBLE* a disservice to call it a horror film. It's more a sort of unsettling art film that has taken in key aspects of pop-culture horror and fused them to its own ends, using these elements to tap into the audience's collective consciousness. Aesthetically, this is no small achievement, but it results in a film with somewhat limited mass appeal. The shocks are all there, but the thrills are largely absent—deliberately so, it seems, since the movie is so carefully structured in every respect. (On the surface, *JACK BE NIMBLE* appears complex, even perhaps confusing, but the viewer is given every possible piece of information for complete comprehension—always assuming the viewer actually pays attention.)

The story follows the fortunes of Jack (Arquette) and Dora (the improbably named Sarah Smuts Kennedy), siblings separated in toddlerhood when their par-



ents gave them up for adoption. (Mummy walks out on her pig of a husband, so he naturally gets rid of them.) Jack gets the worst of the deal, being taken in by a crude family of farmers—a ghastly husband and wife (Tony Barry and Elizabeth Hawthorne in brilliantly chilling performances) and their even more cosmically Godawful four daughters. The entire family take delight in torturing the sensitive boy (forcing him to watch a pig being slaughtered in a grisly scene that prefigures the film's climax, beating him—once with barbed wire—and generally abusing him, all the while insisting on receiving thanks for giving him a home) while using him for cheap labor. One is neither surprised, nor exactly disturbed when Jack grows to young adulthood and revenges himself on his adoptive parents by hypnotizing them into acts of grisly self-destruction (unwisely leaving their appalling brood intact). Having freed himself from the bondage of these bucolic horrors, he sets out to find Dora, whose own life has been no bowl of cherries, especially after a blow to the head unleashes the lonely girl's already embryonic psychic powers. When the pair team up (Dora not quite realizing how unhinged her brother is), they go looking for their real parents with very unpredictable, unsettling, and ultimately horrific results.

JACK BE NIMBLE is by no means a film for everyone—nor a film anyone is going to want to watch too often. Owing to its unrelentingly grim, downbeat, even hopeless tone, but it is nonetheless such a brilliantly made film that it almost demands to be admired in spite of itself.

Image's DVD presentation, despite its full frame presentation, is truly stunning. The colors are amazingly vivid, especially for so dark a film as this, and the images beautifully defined and sharp, even in the most dimly lit scenes. The Dolby 2.0 Surround sound is equally impressive and beautifully captures the film's brilliant sound design and Chris Neal's magnificent score.

—Ken Hanke

THE FLYING SERPENT

Image Entertainment
DVD, \$19.99

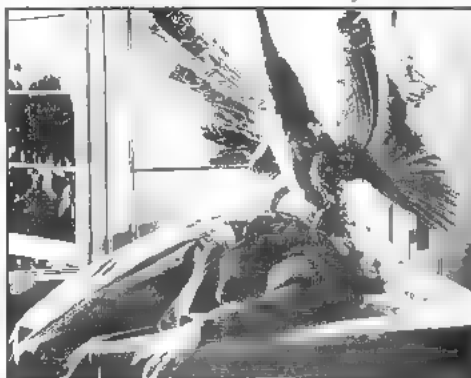
For those who couldn't get enough of Bela Lugosi's 1940 cheapie *THE DEVIL BAT*, or felt that the story rated a different interpretation, fear not—for that film's writer, John T. Neville, dusted off the premise, changed the titular beast, and rewrote it as *THE FLYING SERPENT* (1946). Starring George Zucco, the actor who always looked as if he was in a foul mood. *Serpent* takes place in New Mexico, where a collection of Aztec ruins are said to contain treasures of gold hidden by Emperor Montezuma before he high-tailed it south to Mexico. Legend also speculates on a nasty mythical creature guarding the loot from greedy outsiders. Zucco, playing moody archaeologist Professor Andrew Forbes, knows very well that both the stash and the creature are real, for he has claimed his share of the gold and hidden it away inside one of the ruins, where it is watched over by Quetzalcoatl, the deadly winged serpent of the film's title.

Quetzalcoatl is trained by Forbes to dispose of those who dare to search for the treasure or even so much as get on the professor's bad side. He does this by plucking one of the feathers from the caged creature, planting it on his designated victim, and unleashing the monster, which then hones in on its prey, rips open its throat, drains its blood, and retrieves the feather. Obediently, the serpent returns to its cage, but does not seem to have benefited from its steady diet of blood. Rather than a magisterial beast with a wingspan comparable to that of *Mothra*, we are given a rather tired looking thing about the size of your average pheasant. Of course, this being PRC, one of the cheapest of all poverty row studios, the serpent in flight provokes more giggles than chills, resembling as it does a papier-mâché piñata being strung along on wires.

Despite the brief, 59-minute running time, the premise quickly becomes repetitious as Forbes springs the dirty beast on one unsuspecting victim too many. The painless-but-uninspired proceedings are not helped by a bland supporting cast that includes Ralph Lewis as a nosy mystery writer serving as an amateur sleuth, Hope Kramer as Forbes' pretty but clueless stepdaughter, and Wheaton Chambers as an ornithologist who foolishly keeps his window open while inspecting Quetzalcoatl's feather.

The DVD is taken from a fairly shabby print that includes unsightly scratches throughout, as well as numerous skips and blemishes. The end of one particular scene jumps abruptly to the next, hinting that a snippet or two of dialogue might have gone missing in the process. For extras there's a chapter index with cinematically inspired names such as "Broadcast News" and "Gods and Monsters," plus a full filmography of Zucco, with the year of release listed for each of his movie. No explanation is given as to why director Sam Newfield is credited here as Sherman Scott or who on the PRC staff misspelled Milton Kibbee's name as "Miltin" in the opening credits.

—Barry Monush



THE CORPSE VANISHES/ THE DEVIL BAT

The Roan Group
DVD, \$29.95

Those madcap Roan boys have been at it again, bringing us another classy set of public domain titles. Bela Lugosi's Monogrammer, *THE CORPSE VANISHES* (1942), and his sole PRC outing, *THE DEVIL BAT* (1940). This is the second release of the latter on DVD, but it's good to have *THE CORPSE VANISHES* on DVD in a razor-sharp incarnation of a title previously relegated to crummy eighth-generation dupes. Let's just accept *THE DEVIL BAT* as a deliciously nefarious bonus.

THE CORPSE VANISHES is neither the best, nor the worst, nor even the funniest of Bela's nine Monogram films from the forties. It falls somewhere in the middle, with a slight edge toward the better works in this set (better, in this case, being a relative term). The story is nonsensical and attains a kind of goofy surrealism that is lost on the detractors of this series of films, but which might well have been embraced by Luis Buñuel, whose own deliberately surreal and intellectual work often seems influenced by this more inadvertent brand of surrealism. That may sound like fanciful intellectualizing of a bad movie, but there is some point to it—though the point must be understood to have been completely unconscious on the parts of those responsible for *THE CORPSE VAN-*

ISHES and its brethren. The Monogram folks almost certainly had no idea how strange, twisted, illogical and often funny their work was—and likely didn't care, either. It was unconscious, genuinely natural (or unnatural) talent.

Lugosi plays Dr. Lorenz, mad scientist and orchid hybridizer(!), who has developed an orchid that causes those who inhale its perfume to fall into a deathlike trance. The point of this perfidious pose is to "do in" brides at the altar so that Lorenz and his cohorts can make off with the "corpses." The object: to restore the youth of his elderly bitch of a wife (Elizabeth Russell) by tapping into the girls (presumably virginal) glandular fluids. Why he should bother is anyone's guess, since Mrs. Lorenz is just about the most astoundingly unpleasant character imaginable. And why Lorenz can't find some slightly less attention-grabbing method of procuring fluid donors is hardly the point when we're talking about a man who lives in a rambling old mansion with a sinister housekeeper (Minerva Urecal) and her bizarre progeny (the dwarf Angelo Rossitto and the hulking Frank Moran—the woman's gene pool must baffle science), sleeps in (Code approved?) twin coffins with his Mrs., and prowls secret passages for no good reason except that he's played by Lugosi.

The film has its usual quota of Monogrammic shortcomings—bad acting in the smaller roles, astoundingly bad day-for-night shooting, howlingly silly notions (a great newspaper headline proclaims, "Corpse Thief Believed Crank"), and a meandering script. But *THE CORPSE VANISHES* has atmosphere (within its limitations) and a strange, coldblooded grimness in its more overtly horrific scenes that is quite out of keeping with the era's tamer horrors. The film's "operating room" scenes are an example of this—the atmosphere heavy, Mrs. Lorenz's screaming non-stop and disconcerting, the injections brutally handled—and the ending plays like grand opera, with backstabbing, strangulation, and a slew of corpses before it's all over. Unfortunately, this is so piled on that the grimness becomes risible. Still these moments

Continued on page 72





Those familiar with the oeuvre of Edward D. Wood Jr. will be unsurprised by the contents of three recently published books. The expected logic flaws, simplistic world view, and occasional outright misuses of words (if the word *sounds* like the one Wood wanted, he seems to have been satisfied) are all there. The word "angora" appears no less than seven times in the first 32 pages of *Killer in Drag*. Angora doesn't make an appearance till page 27 of *Death of a Transvestite*, but a "soft cardigan sweater" (we know what Wood had to have meant) surfaces earlier in the text. On page four of *Hollywood Rat Race*, Wood offers observations on the contents of a suitcase of the typical aspiring Hollywood actress, and cannot resist inserting this parenthetical reference to sweaters: "(including a good, fluffy pink angora that cost plenty)." The man was clearly unregenerate in his obsessions and fetishes. He was incapable of setting such things aside even in the case of the two novels, which are clearly down and dirty flat payment (read: no royalties) works for hire. In literature as in film, Wood is distinctly himself. He may not be a good artist, but he is indisputably an artist—uncompromising in some delirious crackpot manner, but uncompromising all the same. However, as much as the books deliver that which we expect of Wood, they contain more than their fair share of surprises. And some of those surprises suggest that the literary Mr. Wood was a little more revelatory than his cinematic counterpart—an amazing thing, considering the autobiographical (if bizarre) nature of *GLEN OR GLENDA* (1953).

Much of our image of Wood has been colored by Johnny Depp's characterization in Tim Burton's *ED WOOD* (1994), a film that eschews poking into the darker corners of Wood's life, leaving him at a bittersweet imaginary high-point rather than exploring his descent into alcoholism, pornography, and almost unspeakable poverty. Burton's film carefully desexualizes Wood (after all, it is a Tim Burton picture), making much of his penchant for female attire, but always stressing that there was otherwise nothing "ex-

otic" in his sexual tendencies. "No, I'm all man—even fought in WWII," Wood says at one point. "No, I'm just a transvestite," he explains later when Vampiria (Lisa Marie) says, "I thought you were a fruit." The image is hardly at odds with the one Wood himself painted in *GLEN OR GLENDA*, a film containing the doubtless useful information that one can easily tell the mere transvestite from the actual homosexual by the length of time he holds your hand when accepting a light. (Wood doesn't explain how to differentiate straight from gay when faced with the non-smoking transvestite.) The case seems pretty cut and dried—or rather it did till these books came along to raise some not uninteresting musings . . .

Killer in Drag and *Death of a Transvestite* are essentially two halves of a long book recounting the tale of syndicate hitman Glen Marker. Glen is a high-priced paid assassin, whose work is always performed by his feminine counterpart, Glenda Satin. It is difficult to believe that Wood chose the Glen/Glenda combination solely by accident or from sheer laziness of invention, therefore it is not unreasonable to assume some measure of self-portraiture is inherent in the resulting books. The storyline, of course, certainly has nothing to do with Wood himself, but how much of Wood is there in Glen/Glenda and his desires? Considering the fact that the surface details are very much at one with the Wood we know, it's hard not to assume that at least some of the deeper aspects of the character are more than casually related to him.

After establishing the basic setup of Glen's situation in *Killer in Drag*, the plot proper gets underway. Having amassed a nest egg, Glen is ready for a significant change in his lifestyle. He plans to quit the mob with the aid of an influential elderly homosexual, Dalton Van Carter, who could also "be instrumental in causing Glenda's greatest desire to be fulfilled"—and Glenda's greatest desire is nothing less than "the operation which would make Glenda a real girl." This is a far cry from "No, I'm just a transvestite."



Moreover, the books—which mostly present Glen as basically heterosexual—make no bones about the fact that Glen has more than a passing familiarity with the “love that dare not speak its name,” or at least the mechanics involved. Glen is quite willing to become Van Carter’s lover if it will get him what he wants, and any objections that Glen has seem to be born of the fact that Van Carter is a “real Grandma type homosexual” and well advanced in years. There isn’t the slightest hint of revulsion at the concept of gay sex, merely at the aesthetics of the partner involved. Similarly, when the time comes to get down to cases with the old boy, Glen/Glenda has no qualms and



discovers that he honestly likes Van Carter. In fact, the two actually begin to make love in a fairly graphic manner (“Dalten Van Carter’s tongue searched the small boyish nipples of her breasts”) that again suggests a much greater familiarity with this aspect of sex—and a far greater appreciation of the male sex—than the standard take on Wood. (Could this explain the gratuitous torn-shirt beefcake of Tony McCoy in 1956’s *BRIDE OF THE MONSTER*?) Just where Wood might have taken this is unresolved, since the plot intrudes when Van Carter’s jilted lover, Karl, bursts into the room and kills him, plunging Glen into the man-on-the-run

story that forms the basis of both books. It is the only direct such episode in the books, but far from the only clue to Wood’s sexual point of view.

Equally open to interpretation is the fact that Glen as Glenda obviously enjoys the effect his stunning appearance has on men. (Glenda apparently looks more fetching in this idealized version than the evidence presented in *GLEN OR GLENDA* would have us believe.) Nearly every man who sees Glenda wants “her,” and Glen delights in the prospect of men indulging in masturbatory fantasies in his wake. The journey in the elevator to Van Carter’s apartment is a key such moment—“Glenda felt sure this little man would retire to the men’s room in the basement as soon as he could get clear of his elevator, so she kissed him quickly on his high forehead, leaving a big red smear of lipstick. She felt sure her kiss, and its remaining imprint, would help him later in what he would have to do.” This is about as far afield from the explicable actions of a straight boy in women’s clothing as it is possible to get! (It’s also amazingly narcissistic.)

Another strange stretch of psychology occurs in *Killer in Drag* when Glen buys a carnival as a front and is immediately latched onto by the show’s “half-man half-woman,” Shirlee (“I suppose I did have a name like Robert or Andrew or Tom on my birth certificate—it’s been so long since I’ve seen it.”) Glen is immediately tagged as a transvestite by Shirlee, who is obviously homosexual (“You know the old saying—it takes one to know one. Come on, honey, tell Aunt Shirlee all about it.”) Shirlee is a bit of a freak, who seems to get his kicks by letting a pederast chew his toes

preferably through rubber shoes! He’s also an alcoholic, but the character is not unsympathetically observed, and his major scene with Glen ends in the literary equivalent of a tasteful fade to black. Actually, given the fact that Glen is generally involved with women, yet is invariably focused on the goal of becoming a woman himself, Shirlee can be viewed as another autobiographical character—half man-half woman, indicative of the apparently conflicting desires at work in Ed and his literary alter-ego.

Glen’s adventures in evading the law and the mob come to an inconclusive end in *Killer in Drag* with him ahead of the cops, but with the mob putting out a contract via yet another transvestite hitman. (One might wonder where they all come from, but this is Wood territory and such questions should not be asked.) The story picks up immediately, albeit in a more adventurous format, in *Death of a Transvestite*. The book is something of a structural freak of literature, a story pieced together from a number of viewpoints—the warden who is about to have Glen executed, Glen, Glen’s taped confession, police reports, other testimony (doubtless it is “sworn testimony,” just as it was in 1958’s *PLAN NINE FROM OUTER SPACE*.) The surprising thing about this convoluted approach is that Wood actually pulls off a coherent narrative! (Perhaps the jumbled viewpoints were more consistent with Wood’s own mind-set.) The story is just as bizarrely fetishistic as *Killer in Drag*—Glen will tell the whole story to the warden in return for a last request. There are no prizes for guessing what that is—to go to the chair in drag. “And to be buried in such clothes. That’s my last request, Warden. I want you to get me a blouse, a soft cardigan sweater, a skirt, high-heeled shoes and the proper undies. And don’t tell me regulations forbid it because I doubt if such a request has ever been made before, so there can’t be and regulations for a precedent.” Naturally, since there would be no book otherwise, Glen’s request is granted and the rest of his story is told.

Technically, *Death of a Transvestite*, owing to its surprisingly intricate structure, is the more impressive book, but it is also less telling than *Killer in Drag* and the storyline considerably less interesting. Many of the same quirky notions resurface—Glenda giving an old codger a thrill by a little sexual tease, for instance. The most intriguing addition (apart from Wood’s somewhat reactionary take on the

PAGE 22: Sarah Jessica Parker and Johnny Depp (as Dolores Fuller and Edward D. Wood Jr.) recreate a scene from *GLEN OR GLENDA* (1953) for *ED WOOD* (1994). BELOW: Bevare! Bevare! It’s Bela Lugosi practicing his patented hand gestures on Tommy Haynes in *GLEN OR GLENDA*.





Death of a transvestite! Lyle Talbot is on the job when the body of a cross-dresser (Ed Wood acting as Daniel Davis) is found in **GLEN OR GLENDIA**.

troubled times of the late sixties) is Glenda's musing about what life would be like after the sex-change operation. "There was still the fact that I wanted the operation that would kill my manhood once and for all, which brought up a thing that troubled me greatly. How would it really be when I was a girl? I had a great love for sex with girls. But when the operation made me a girl, there would be no girls for me, unless I went to lesbian love, there would have to be men. Of course there had been a few in my past, but they just weren't my cup of tea." Even so, Glen wants the operation, hoping, it seems, that being a girl will change his attitude toward Ear. Grey! The idea is nothing if not screwy—or is it? Another way of reading this is to suggest that men may indeed be what Glen desires—he certainly enjoys making them desire him—but that he cannot be comfortable with it unless he is "properly" equipped to make love to them. And what might that tell us of the inner thoughts of Wood himself? The key word is "might," since

we can only speculate on this point, but it certainly adds up to a more complex picture of Ed Wood than the one we have so long been given. It clearly suggests that there was a lot more to Wood the person than his delightfully absurd, cheerfully inept movies ever led us to believe.

Interesting in a much more minor way is Wood's *Hollywood Rat Race*, a dated how-to-crash Tinseltown and become a star-director-actor handbook. Apart from the fuzzy sweater kink parading full-blown throughout, the book is a fairly credible guide to making it in Hollywood—and thus not especially interesting. What makes it worthwhile is the image that Wood presents of himself and many of his cohorts. Hollywood itself is looked at with unflinching cynicism (albeit in a weirdly loving manner), but Wood views himself through the haze of what he would liked to have been, not what he was in fact. Here, Wood isn't a shoestring cinematic mountebank (he was far too genuine to be a fake, of course), but rather a successful and seasoned pro—an independent producer of note, most of whose films went on to be released by "major distributors!" It doesn't make Wood so much a liar (he's generous with his delusions, claiming that Bela Lugosi was in demand till the day he died) as it makes him a figure of intense pathos, a man who couldn't face the reality of his existence without the crutch of his delusions. In itself, that may be as telling as the hints of a much more sexually ambivalent Wood in his novels. It may even give credence to the questions that arise from those other works. As such, *Hollywood Rat Race*, while not possessing the same intrinsic interest as *Killer in Drag* and *Death of a Transvestite*, is the perfect companion piece. All three books are essential Wood, even if their more "sensational" aspects are apt to frighten the horses where Wood's more reactionary fans are concerned.

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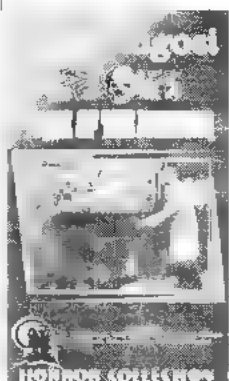


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PARAMOUNT HORRORS THE 1940S

by Ken
Hanke

In the 1930s, Paramount Pictures had been quick to jump on the horror-film craze launched by Universal with a series of films notable for their grim, often over-the-top stylishness. Without a specific gallery of monsters, a contract horror star, or a solitary horror-specialist director, the studio still managed to carve itself a distinctive niche in the genre, second only to Universal, and with individual films that sometimes surpassed them. But by the mid-thirties, the studio had run out of steam on the genre, shifting more and more toward simpler thrillers and romantic fantasies. When the 1935 outcry against horror films and the British moral campaign on them arrived the next year, Paramount was already pretty much out of the game.



ABOVE: Bob Hope attained full-fledged movie stardom with his role as the reluctant hero in *THE CAT AND THE CANARY* (1939). Pictured with Ol' Ski Nose is Douglass Montgomery, Paulette Goddard, and John Beal. PREVIOUS PAGE: The critical and box-office success of *THE CAT AND THE CANARY* spawned a Hope/Goddard reteaming called *THE GHOST BREAKERS* (1940), in which Goddard was menaced by a zombie (Noble Johnson).

History, however, has a habit of repeating itself. In 1938, when Universal found it had a goldmine in its old horror pictures (and precious few other assets except one named Deanna Durbin) and decided to launch what would become the second wave of horror, it was not surprising to find Paramount close behind. But just as it was a different Universal churning out horror films, so it was a much changed Paramount.

It wasn't just horror films that had suffered in the latter half of the thirties—everything had. Both 1937 and 1938 had been underwhelming years at the box office. The new had worn off everything and the studios were tending to offer streamlined or outright cut-rate products lacking the flair and imagination of the first half of the decade. It was a strange case of the movies being the same, only less so. The year 1939—often considered the best year the movies ever had (a point open to serious debate)—was less a product of inspiration than one of desperation. Paramount had more than one reason to despair: a lackluster production schedule (they'd lost their powerhouse directors—save for Cecil B. DeMille—and a number of big stars) and a young comedian on their roster was proving a "find" they were beginning to wish could be lost.

Having scored a surprise hit with audiences by introducing Leo Robin and Ralph Rainger's "Thanks for the Memory" in *THE BIG BROADCAST OF 1938*, vaudevillian/stage star/radio personality Bob Hope was a likely candidate for stardom when Paramount signed him. That they then thrust him into a string of uninspired B pictures (rehashes of plays they owned, an Eddie Cantor cast-off, etc.) was clearly not the coolest of moves, but it seemed not to occur to the studio that it might be the material at fault and not the new star. With the successful reissues of *DRACULA* and *FRANKENSTEIN* (both 1931) in 1938, Paramount opted to dust off John Wilford's stage thriller, *THE CAT AND THE CANARY*, and tailor it to Hope's talents. Some clever person, apparently remembering that Hope's one film success had presented him more or less as himself—a radio star—finally tapped into the things that had appealed to listeners and integrated what we now think of as the Hope character into the new version of the old play. Paramount soon had

their first horror picture (albeit a comic one) in four years and Hope attained screen stardom.

THE CAT AND THE CANARY was not as bold a move as Universal's flat-out super special horror show, 1939's *SON OF FRANKENSTEIN* (the biggest, though certainly not the best, horror extravaganza in the studio's history), nor did it start an avalanche of horror in the forties, but it put Paramount back among the players, and once again the studio carved a special niche for themselves in the genre. Their new horror efforts were not by and large in the same league as their thirties counterparts (nor were Universal's, if it comes to that), but they were certainly . . . unusual, even if their odd qualities were almost certainly accidental, as is evidenced from the tentative nature of their approach and the tendency to try to follow trends as the decade progressed.

The success of *THE CAT AND THE CANARY* naturally prompted Paramount to repeat the formula using much the same logic and more elaborate production values. Once again, Bob Hope was cast as a radio personality, Lawrence L. Lawrence (the middle initial stands for Lawrence, too—"My parents had no imagination"), and the character was worked into an old stage thriller. In this case it was Paul Dickey's venerable *THE GHOST BREAKER*—made plural either out of deference to Hope's returning costar, Paulette Goddard, or his teaming with black comic, Willie Best. *THE GHOST BREAKERS* (1940) was much more elaborate in its horror elements than *CAT* (though oddly, the former film is ultimately creepier), boasting an honest-to-Gambala zombie and genuine ghostly doings, along with the requisite human villainy that propels the plot. The approach worked and continues to work today, because of the seamless blending of Hope's nervous wisecracks and the horrific elements, which are only enhanced by the comedy.

The premise is almost identical to *THE CAT AND THE CANARY*, presenting Goddard as Mary Carter, the beleaguered heiress of a castle off the coast of Cuba. As in all such situations, the place is supposed to be haunted and comes complete with all the essential stories designed to bring down property values quicker than the announcement of an impending pig farm next door (meaning, of course, that



Two birds in the hands of two pussies! TOP: the Cat (Forrest Stanley) tries to scratch out a living on Laura LaPlante in the 1927 silent classic. ABOVE: Paulette Goddard in the arms of (possibly) Douglass Montgomery.

the castle must hold a valuable secret of some sort). Lawrence enters the proceedings by accident—or rather, a series of accidents. Thinking he's inadvertently offed a presumed henchman (Anthony Quinn) of gangster Frenchy Duval (Paul Fix), he hides in Mary's steamer trunk and soon finds himself aboard a ship bound for Cuba. When he learns that he isn't responsible for the gangster's death, he nearly deserts the scene, but Goddard's feminine allure quickly outweighs his natural cowardice and he appoints himself her personal "ghostbreaker."

Director George Marshall creates a fine sense of the horrific from the film's very onset, with a huge thunder storm ("Basil Rathbone must be throwing a party") in New York, and continues to generate a similar tone throughout the film. (Much like its predecessor, daylight is a rare intruder into the world of *THE GHOST BREAKERS*) Maintaining such a mood is one thing, but it does precious little good unless something comes from it. Blessedly, once the film hits the mysterious island much does come from it. The atmosphere is very nearly the equal of that found in Victor Halperin's *WHITE ZOMBIE* (1932), only the smart lines and clever remarks make it more humanly so. Funny as it is to find Lawrence asking a zombie's mother (Virginia Brissac) if he could interest her in a subscription to *Weird Stories* magazine, the effect is very much that of whistling in the dark. The same is also true of the over-the-top encounter with the zombie played by horror vet Noble Johnson. ("I don't know, but it ain't Baby Snooks!"). The film errs only in that it lacks the punch of the extended chase that worked so well in *THE CAT AND THE CANARY* and is here replaced by a far more perfunctory climax—obviously patterned on its parent, but happening too fast to be really effective.

The studio's other 1940 entry in the horror sweepstakes, *DR. CYCLOPS*, might be more properly called a stunt picture than a horror film, though it is certainly horrific in its approach. The film marked the return of Ernest B. Schoedsack to the genre in an attempt to recapture the glory of *KING KONG*. This round the thrills, however, would be generated not from something gigantic, but rather from characters scaled down and forced to confront normal-sized terrors. The idea wasn't in itself unique. Tod Browning had explored not dissimilar territory with *THE DEVIL DOLL* (1936), his adaptation of Abraham Merritt's novel, *Burn, Witch, Burn* (1919), while Laurel and Hardy had cavorted with oversized props in their short film, *BRATS* (1930). What set *DR. CYCLOPS* apart from such earlier efforts was Technicolor, making it the first horror film since *MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM* (1933) to utilize the process, and the first ever in the perfected three-strip Technicolor system. So strongly was the studio behind the film as a Technicolored novelty that they didn't even bother listing the cast in the film's opening credits! (That the cast—apart from Albert Dekker as Dr. Thorkel—was hardly anything to get worked up over may have entered into this. Indeed, it was leading lady Janice Logan's fifth film—and her last. Leading man Thomas Coley went her one better by making this his only film. But then the largely no-name cast was in itself a nod to the film being sold on effects and color.)

Truth to tell, *DR. CYCLOPS'* much-vaunted Technicolor works against it as much as for it. At first, it appears that Schoedsack is going to use the medium with alarming creativity (of the sort frowned on by the Terror of Technicolor, Natalie Kalmus, who—usually with her latest boyfriend in tow as her assistant—adored telling directors, cinematographers, and even studio heads how to use her husband's process). The film's first scene, in fact, is all but devoid of color, taking place in the eerie, greenish, flickering illumination of Thorkel's radioactive chamber. Ironically, this monochromatic opening is probably the film's

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The Mysterious Death of DR. CYCLOPS

by Richard Valley

At the thrilling conclusion of Paramount's Technicolor chiller DR. CYCLOPS (1940), the mad Dr. Thorkel is rendered one-eyed when one of the pop-bottle lenses of his glasses is smashed by the half pint humans he himself has reduced in size. Having already lost his tenuous grip on reality, Thorkel literally loses his grip on a plank stretching across a radioactive pit and plummets to a particularly gruesome and bizarre death.

It's a classic scene from what is at least a semi-classic film. But as bizarre deaths go, it's nothing compared to the grand finale played by Albert Dekker, the crafty, well-liked character actor who played Thorkel so indelibly that this one role forever established his place in the Horror Hall of Fame...

"This has everything but a vampire bite." According to Laurie Jacobson, author of *Hollywood Heartbreak: The Tragic and Mysterious Deaths of Hollywood's Most Remarkable Legends* (Simon and Schuster, 1984), that was the unofficial word from the Los Angeles police.

Uncharacteristically of La La Land, it wasn't an understatement. Dekker's final moments were freakish enough to net him a glowing account in that premier Book of Freaks, Kenneth Anger's infamous *Hollywood Babylon II* (E.F. Dutton, 1984).

On the morning of May 5, 1968, the lingerie-clad body of 63-year-old Albert Dekker was discovered in his Hollywood apartment ("The corpse was clad in women's

dainty silk lingerie," Anger writes daintily.) Dekker was kneeling in his bathtub, his hands cuffed behind him. A rubber ball filled his mouth, a metal wire passing through the ball in the manner of a horse bit. A leather belt circled the actor's neck, and a rope tied to the belt ran down the length of his body and bound his ankles together. Suggestive, sadomasochistic writing covered his cheeks, abdomen, buttocks. Two hypodermic needles protruded from his cold, lifeless body.

Dekker's dismal demise was the final stop on a downward spiral that had begun 11 years earlier with the April 1957 death of his 16-year-old son, John, a probable suicide. Before that catastrophic event, Dekker's life had been running a smooth course, even though he had run afoul of Senator Joe McCarthy and his disgraceful witch hunt in the early fifties and suffered "graylisting." (A life-long liberal, the actor had served in the California legislature from 1944 to 1946 as the Democratic Assemblyman from the 57th District.) Dekker had made his stage debut in 1927, and was firmly established on Broadway when the silver screen beckoned a decade later. The films that established him with moviegoers proved an eclectic mix: THE GREAT GARRICK (1937, directed by James Whale), MARIE ANTOINETTE (1938), THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK (1939, again with Whale), BEAU GESTE (1939), SEVEN SINNERS (1940), AMONG THE LIVING (1940), THE WOMAN OF THE TOWN (1944, as Bat Masterson), THE KILLERS (1946), THE FRENCH KEY (1946), GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT (1947), TARZAN'S MAGIC FOUNTAIN (1949), AS YOUNG AS YOU FEEL (1951), EAST OF EDEN (1955), KISS ME DEADLY (1955), MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT (1959), and SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER (1959).

After his son's burial, Dekker didn't act in another motion picture for six years. (His "comeback" vehicle was 1965's GAMERA—although, once again displaying the variety of projects to which he lent his talents, he immediately followed it with television appearances in Tennessee Williams' CAMINO REAL and Arthur Miller's DEATH OF A SALESMAN.) He returned to the stage, began indulging in drugs and kinky sex, and divorced his wife of 20 years. (They had two children, a son and daughter, in addition to John.) In 1969, however, he'd had one of his best roles in years as Pat Harrigan in THE WILD BUNCH, and was engaged to marry model Geraldine Saunders, who at 45 was his junior by 18 years. According to her own testimony, Saunders last saw Dekker three days before his body was discovered. Worried, she had herself let into his apartment, but was quickly turned away by the superintendent when he found Dekker's body in the bathroom.

The full circumstances of Albert Dekker's last hours have never been disclosed. Geraldine Saunders suspects foul play. Dekker's surviving son, Benjamin van Dekker, believes it was a sex scene between consenting adults, one that went tragically awry.

Dr. Cyclops had vanished into the void....



RIGHT: The antisocial DR. CYCLOPS (Albert Dekker) tries to rid himself of unwelcome houseguests (Victor Killian, Janice Logan, Charles Halton, and Thomas Coley). **BELOW:** One of the title characters of *THE MONSTER AND THE GIRL* (1941). **PAGE 31 LEFT:** Having shrunk his hapless visitors (Frank Yaconelli is pictured with the previously named actors), Thorkel tries to weed them out of his garden. **PAGE 31 RIGHT:** The little people try to open a door that (to them) is as big as the one behind which lurked the Eighth Wonder of the World.

PARAMOUNT HORRORS

Continued from page 28

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Ill or not, Mendoza is going all the way with this patented speechifying. "You must listen to me before it is too late. When I first discovered this gigantic radium deposit, I thought first of you—of Dr. Thorkel, my teacher, of Dr. Thorkel, the great biologist. I sent for you to counsel me. I began to imagine here in the jungle the Thorkel Institute—a palace of healing to which all might come." Unimpressed by this youthful altruism, Thorkel counters, "Bah! Are we then country doctors? You do not realize what we have here. In our very hands we have the cosmic force of creation itself! In our very hands we can shape life, take it apart, put it together again, mould it like putty!" As with so many would-be do-gooders before and after him, the hapless Mendoza remains blissfully ignorant of the fact that his mentor, being a few sandwiches shy

of a picnic, might conceivably be dangerous and persists in his harangue. "But what you are doing is mad! It is diabolic! You are tampering with powers reserved to God!"

This argument cut no ice with Henry Frankenstein and it only



serves to amuse and inflame Thorkel. "That is good! That is very good! That is just what I am doing!" And still poor Mendoza persists in sensing no danger, declaring, "Well, I will not permit it!" "Are you forgetting who is master and who is pupil?" asks Thorkel menacingly. "No, and therefore I beg of you to renounce this great evil!" "You would interfere with my work!" realizes Thorkel, and he proceeds to nip that eventuality in the bud by thrusting his former pupil's head into the path of a large adult-sized dose of radiation, affording him a grisly death (the only truly such in the film). Now, all this is good over-the-top mad doctor material and no mistake, but only a film with some genuinely hardcore thrills to follow would dare to place it at the very onset—and since those thrills never materialize it's hard not to wonder if the parties responsible were significantly tighter-wrapped than Dr. Thorkel.

Nothing that happens after this opening ever lives up to it. Indeed, the film's next scene seems to belong before it, with venerable Frank Reicher (a casting nod to his stint as Captain Englehorn in *KING KONG*?) offering words of warning to Dr. Bullfinch (Charles Halton), who has been summoned to aid Thorkel in his work. "You know Dr. Thorkel only by reputation," he asserts. "I worked with him one winter at the Institute. He's a very strange man, abnormally secretive about his experiments, and now, that for two years he's buried himself in a camp in the Amazon jungle, who knows what his mental state may be." Well, the viewer certainly has no doubts on that score.

Still, the film isn't in serious trouble, but it soon arrives at that destination with the introduction of Dr. Mary Robinson (Janice Logan). Up to this point, the film is scored by Ernst Toch, who had done similar honors for *THE CAT AND THE CANARY* and *THE GHOST BREAKERS*. His main title and the music for the first scene are splendid horror-film work, but here Dr. Toch seems to have been saddled with two other composers, whose work can charitably be described as Paramount Sprightly, or less charitably as Travelogue Ordinaire. The music that accompanies our heroine's entrance is insanely jaunty, completely destroying the mood of the first two scenes, and it gets worse as soon as the movie embarks on the journey to South America. Once we get to the establishing shots of jungle tendrils, the score has devolved into such a frenzy of lush tropicality that one expects Bing, Bob, and Dottie to saunter through on their way to a Road picture.

And then there's Thomas Coley in his debut/swansong as the most amazingly laid-back leading man ever conceived. For reasons best known to screenwriter Tom Kilpatrick and director Schoedsack—and perhaps Coley himself—the character, Bill Stockton, is played for all the world like Lewis Howard in the Deanna Durbin musical, *FIRST LOVE* (1939), and seems to have actually been modeled on



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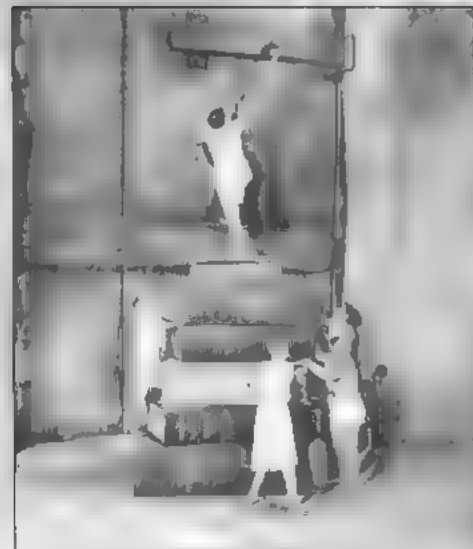
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If all this makes it seem as if *DR. CYCLOPS* is much too much in the dead loss column, it shouldn't. Flawed though it is, there are good things in the film—just not quite enough of them. The coldblooded manner in which Thorkel disposes of Dr. Bullfinch is a grim business, harkening back to the matter-of-factness in such matters that marked Paramount's thurles films. Unfortunately, many of the other bits of mayhem, including the murder of Pedro (Frank Yaconelli), are so offhand as to be almost casual. The big storm sequence in the jungle (someone really should have chided the studio in on the notable lack of cockatoos in South America) is not unimpressive, but again the color makes everything too bright and cheerful and rather than climax, the sequence just stops. Pretty much the same can be said about the film's ending, too, which has a rushed feeling and an almost complete lack of suspense, perhaps because it's not easy to really care what happens to these characters. (The scene is unfairly marred today, too, by a piece of music used later by Preston Sturges for the phony "art" film in which Capital and Labor destroy each other in 1941's *SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS*.) Moreover, for an effects picture, the movie is a very mixed bag. The scenes with the oversized props are generally very well done, but many sequences are marred by process work that wouldn't fool viewers with even worse eyesight than the myopic title character.

The one significant thing *DR. CYCLOPS* has going for it is Albert Dekker. Dekker's career was rather strange (as, it seems, was Dekker himself). Having established himself on the Broadway stage, he came to Hollywood and debuted on the screen in James Whale's 1937 comedy biopic, *THE GREAT GARRICK*, after which he drifted from studio to studio, usually landing fairly thankless roles. He did have an amusing turn as the butler in Universal's *Crime Club*



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Dekker must have known that his dialogue was strictly Mad Doctor 101 stuff, but he played it for all it was worth and then some, taking special delight in the scenes in which he spars verbally with Charles Halton, the only actor in the film who is really in his league. The scene in which Bullfinch, having discovered the miniaturized bones of a pig, pompously prepares to take credit for discovering a new species of porker, is interrupted by Thorkel's "You are quick to take credit, Dr. Bullfinch. May I see the evidence?" is a prime example. "Undeniably a very small pig," decides Thorkel on examining the bones. "Undeniably an absolutely new species," insists Bullfinch. "Strange how absorbed man has always been in the size of things," muses Thorkel in a line this writer isn't meaning for subtext! "As a biologist, you should remember that size represents the chief difference among mammals. In all essentials, a mouse and a whale are identical," Bullfinch reminds him. "In any event, I am delighted you were slow in setting out this morning. It gives me an opportunity to pay my respects once more," counters Thorkel in an outburst of dismissive bon-homme, only to learn that his guests have no intention of leaving. "But I do not wish you here," he bristles. "The discourtesy, not to mention the outright deceit, with which you have treated me relieves me of any obligation to consider your wishes," Bullfinch declares. "I have only one comment to make—if you remain here another hour, you do so at your own peril," warns Thorkel with delightfully



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PAGE 33 presents what is ostensibly the romantic triangle of *THE MAD DOCTOR* (1941), with both Basil Rathbone and John Howard vying for the love of Ellen Drew—but in actuality the stronger triangle is the one between Rathbone, Drew, and Martin Kosleck (ABOVE LEFT with Basil), who plays Rathbone's homicidal boyfriend. ABOVE RIGHT: As Dr. Sebastian, Rathbone was supposed to commit suicide at the finish of *THE MAD DOCTOR*, but the censors would have none of it.

bland self assurance. It is this—and moments like it—that propels DR. CYCLOPS and Albert Dekker into the realm of the classics, even if in a somewhat minor capacity.

If *THE GHOST BREAKERS* and *DR. CYCLOPS* had been rather tentative stabs at horror, the studio was more than prepared for much grimmer business in 1941, coming up with three of the damndest horror pictures ever made! *THE MAD DOCTOR*, *THE MONSTER AND THE GIRL*, and *AMONG THE LIVING* rank high among the most distinguished cinematic curios—in large part because they seem very much at odds with all the values one associates with Paramount. There is precious little in the way of production gloss and while there is certainly no shortage of decadence—always in vast supply at Paramount—it's a very different flavor of decadence than that found in the studio's thirties films. That was the decadence of sophistication, of dissolute playboys, of slinky ladies bathing in Moët et Chandon, of sly sexual innuendo. This was the decadence of shopgirl mindsets, of an unregenerately sleazy world, of the *National Enquirer*. In fact, the films might almost be touted as "ripped from today's headlines"—so long as the headlines came from the *Weekly World News* or its 1941 tabloid counterpart. If thirties Paramount decadence winked, the 1941 version leers. On the whole, the movies pander not only to the sensationalistic, but toward the kind of xenophobic anti-intellectualism that one associates with that brand of journalism. (Not only are the villains of *THE MAD DOCTOR*, for example, apparently homosexual, they're also foreigners—which, of course, is even worse!) The resulting films are more like dishes from the Warner Bros. recipe book with a dash of Monogram seasoning (especially in some of the dialogue and the smaller supporting roles) than anything from the five-star Paramount eatery.

THE MAD DOCTOR is quite possibly the oddest of the trio and a film that has garnered an undeservedly bad reputation, based primarily on its misleading title. Confronted with "THE MAD DOCTOR," the viewer has every right to expect crackling machinery, row upon row of bubbling Pyrex doodads, a hunchbacked assistant, a magnificent thunderstorm, and at the very least a simple brain transplant. The only thing *THE MAD DOCTOR* offers us in this line is the thunderstorm. Star Basil Rathbone (throwing another party?) does have an assistant and a bent one at that, but not in the hunchbacked sense.

Ironically, the film started life as *THE MONSTER* (which wasn't much better, since it hasn't one as such) and was later called *DESTINY* (which was misleading only

in that it has no relation to the film as it finally emerged). Those titles were attached to early scripting efforts by no less a team of scribes than Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. It was only after the project was turned over to Howard J. Green that it became *THE MAD DOCTOR*. Whether Hecht and MacArthur left as a result of the film being relegated to B status, or the film became a B picture with their departure, or its B categorization prompted them to have their names removed from the project altogether, is uncertain. The final scripting credit goes only to Green. It's impossible to say how much of the Hecht/MacArthur material was used, though it's also a pretty safe bet that their inkstained paws had something to do with the film's newspaper background, reporter hero, and, in all probability, the outright distrust with which the picture views psychiatry. ('Tis but a small step from the imbecilic alienist of *THE FRONT PAGE* to the assessment of the psychiatrist as "a half-baked soul-meddler" in *THE MAD DOCTOR*.)

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Moreover, there always was a gay subtext to the material. Walter Burns and Hildy Johnson are, yes, presented as the manliest of manly men with a more than passing familiarity with the fair sex—from two-dollar hookers to society dames. However, that's them on the surface. The reality is that they are virtually married to each other over the newspaper (That's why it worked so well when Howard Hawks made Hildy a woman who actually had been married to Walter in 1940's *HIS GIRL FRIDAY*). It's only when Hildy opts out of their relationship for a "real life" and a



PAGE 33 presents what is ostensibly the romantic triangle of *THE MAD DOCTOR* (1941), with both Basil Rathbone and John Howard vying for the love of Ellen Drew—but in actuality the stronger triangle is the one between Rathbone, Drew, and Martin Kosleck (ABOVE LEFT with Basil), who plays Rathbone's homicidal boyfriend. ABOVE RIGHT: As Dr. Sebastian, Rathbone was supposed to commit suicide at the finish of *THE MAD DOCTOR*, but the censors would have none of it.

bland self-assurance. It is this—and moments like it—that propels *DR. CYCLOPS* and Albert Dekker into the realm of the classics, even if in a somewhat minor capacity.

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"real" relationship with the more "appropriate" (read female) Peggy Baldwin that the hidden nature of the Burns/Johnson relationship becomes apparent. It is this that prompts Walter to use every trick in the book to break up Hildy's marriage to Peggy and keep him for the paper—and in so doing keep him for himself, too. Walter invariably espouses the lowest view of womankind, seeing them all as murderers and specialists in betrayal. (He was in love himself once, he claims, only to find his great love had been sleeping with someone on a rival paper and had given him Walter's latest big story.) At one point, Hildy even remarks, "You wouldn't know what to do with a decent girl," to which Walter owlishly responds, "Oh, yes, I would." The concept is clear: women are okay for sexual purposes, but it takes two men to make a relationship worthy of the name. In *THE MAD DOCTOR* (where many of Kosleck's lines about women, as well as the contempt with which Rathbone views the sex, would be right at home in any of Walter's dissertations on the gender), it's simply no longer subtext. It has become text. Indeed, George Sebastian and Maurice Gretz are undoubtedly the most obviously gay couple in any forties movie—and one of the happiest (in their own murderous way, of course), at least until George opts out of the relationship for marriage to a woman whose life insurance premium for a change of pace, he doesn't intend to collect.

THE MAD DOCTOR makes no bones about the matter from the onset. No sooner have George and Maurice effectively disposed of George's most recent matrimonial money-spinner than George holds his own inquest on the shortcomings of the ghastly creature to whom he'd been wed. "These atrocious paintings! This absurd wallpaper! These pathetic antiques. They all breathe her spirit. I can almost see her now, coming down those stairs—with that foolish smile and the lovelight in her eyes." George complains with all the bitterness of a gourmet who's been forced to ingest a quantity of fast food. "She's dead. Isn't that enough?" asks Maurice. "No! I can never forgive her the eight months spent in this cave of romance," pouts George, as he significantly pops a consoling cigar in his mouth! (Sometimes a cigar is only a cigar. At other times . . .)

The playing of the scene—in particular by Kosleck, who actually was gay—is such that it leaves little room for doubt as to the nature of the relationship between this very odd couple, and is made even more apparent by the otherwise unusual fact that master and servant always address each other on a first-name basis. It's when the film moves to New York and George sets himself up as a high-priced psychiatrist that the rift in their romance begins, in the form of one of the most unlikely heroines ever to grace the silver screen. Linda Booth (Ellen Drew), a character who makes the Grim Reaper look like comic relief, is hardly a traditional leading lady. Indeed, she is probably the most morbid such character in any film ("I try to die often—I don't know why") prior to Louise Albritton's Kay Caldwell in *SON OF DRACULA* (1943). Troubled heroines were not exactly new by the time of *THE MAD DOCTOR*, though usually, as with Joan Bennett in Gregory LaCava's *PRIVATE WORLDS* (1935), the truly troubled were relegated to second lead status. But damsels with an out and out death

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The plot proper gets underway when said sister sick Sebastian on her singularly disturbed sibling in a scene set at a charity bazaar with a tropical motif—the better to recycle all those South Sea trappings the studio had on hand, not to mention such library favorites as "Moonlight and Shadows" from 1936's *THE JUNGLE PRINCESS* and "We Should Be Together" from 1937's *WAIKIKI WEDDING* for the soundtrack. Linda quickly demonstrates her "suicide complex" by inexplicably trying to throw herself off the parapet of the roof garden. Understandably alarmed at this behavior, Linda's family is only too happy to turn her over to Sebastian, despite the misgivings of her semi-fiance, Gil Sawyer (John Howard).

For his part, Sebastian is deluged by the prospect of a potential bride with a goodly fortune and a propensity for flinging herself off buildings. He spells out his plans to Maurice (who spends part of the scene carefully arranging a vase of flowers). "Of course, it will entail another wedding." "Oh! So that's it, huh?" muses Maurice. Sebastian explains Linda's suicidal bent. "And if I married her and she died . . . We'd be rich, innocent, and respectable!" purrs Maurice. "Exactly!" Sebastian concurs, despite the singular concept of this duo ever attaining respectability.

Unfortunately, neither of them reckon on the possibility that George might actually fall in love with Linda—or at least fancy that he has—but that's exactly what happens, not long after he "cures" her in a showy bit of "psychiatric nonsense mingling Rimsky-Korsakov, hypnotic suggestion, and the repressed memory of her father's suicide. (Don't even ask.) Soon, George is waxing

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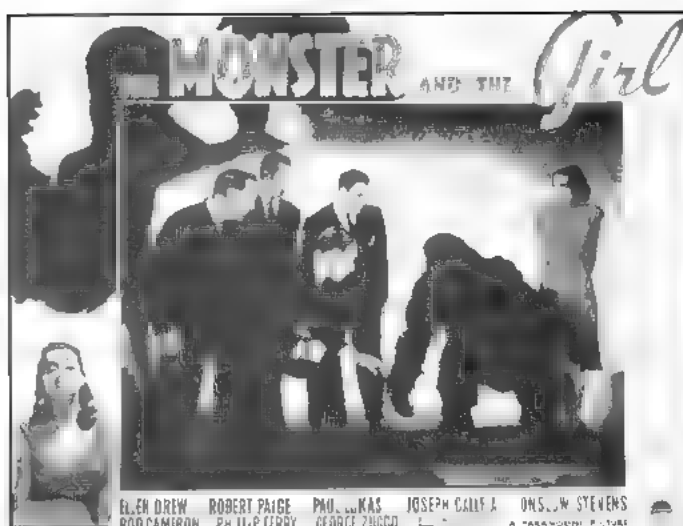


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LEFT: Susan Webster (Ellen Drew) stands aside as her brother (yes, the gorilla!) offs her oppressors (Paul Lukas, Gerald Mohr, Marc Lawrence, and Joseph Calleia) in *THE MONSTER AND THE GIRL*. RIGHT: Murder's been committed, and if the cops had any brains they'd question George Zucco right away—although this time he's innocent!

A degree in psychiatry is not required to guess just how this miraculous conversion is going to sit with Maurice especially given the bland manner in which George breaks the news to him, traipsing into their rooms rabbiting on about the glories of Quito, Ecuador—"That's where we're going to live!" "Are we?" inquires Maurice in a not unhopeful tone. "No, no, no, not you, Maurice—you're too material for the society of elves," George callously informs him, seemingly oblivious to the idea that Maurice might have any objections. "So, you're going to turn elf and drop off to Quito? That's very pretty," Maurice decides in mocking tones. Still unaware that his changed manner might be cause for offense or even hurt, George carries on, "Yes, very pretty. It's a little mountain city perched above a jungle. If you stand on tiptoe you can almost touch the sky—the night opens a parasol of stars over your head." Wincing from George unconsciously rubbing salt into the wound, Maurice sneers, "It does, huh?" "Oh, life is so extremely simple in Quito, Maurice. Even the headhunters smile at you on the promenade," George rhapsodizes. (It's interesting to note that all this romanticized gush is how George speaks of the future to Maurice, while the most gloomy psychoanalytical pontificating did duty for romancing Linda. Probably unconscious, but this very much underscores the fantasy nature of his regeneration.) "When you marry Linda, your picture will be in every paper in the country, and the headhunters of Vienna, Midbury, and Savannah will be very glad to see it," Maurice points out. Even that transparent observation doesn't dent George's belief in his newfound self. "Bah! I'm not interested in those bucolic centers of interest! What I want to know is can a man change his destiny?" Not bothering to note that, even were this possible, the Breen Office wouldn't allow it, Maurice incredulously asks the Big Question, "Are you trying to tell me that you're actually in love with this girl?" Without the first thought for his companion—who is becoming more obviously agitated as the scene progresses—George confesses, "Yes, Maurice, I am. Once again I'm human—sad, weak, full of longings. Once again I'm going to live. Once again I'm the man I was born."

This is altogether too much. Maurice, getting to his feet and trying to retain some vestige of self-control by busy-ing himself with anything he can find, asks, "And what about me?" "Hmm?" asks George, puzzled, but explaining, "We're out of tune, Maurice—you and I." Rushing into the next room to hold in his feelings, Maurice wants to know why. "Why? Has there never crept into that Aboriginal skull of yours a slight wonder as to why anyone so brilliant, so superior as I should have gone through life as



some medieval monster?" "You are a monster, Sebastian—spawned in the dark of the moon, and no breath of God in your soul," Maurice calls back in a fit of jealousy. "That's not true any more! Not true! Her love is breathing the breath of God into my soul," argues George. "And driving the common sense out of your mind," declares Maurice, adding a note of his true feelings, "Have you forgotten that we were going to ride like Fortunatos in that coach of gold?" "Maurice, I'm marrying Linda, and I'm going away with her to be enshrined in a Valentine instead of a rogues' gallery," insists George. "Valentine! Humph!" snorts Maurice. The spurned lover glances at a newspaper for distraction, only to learn that things are not quite so rosy as they appear for the redeemed George. His nemesis from Midbury, the suspicious Dr. Downer (Ralph Morgan), is having his last wife's body exhumed for an autopsy.

This development, of course, changes everything. Now George wants Maurice to indulge in a spot of graverobbing for his sake. "So, we are back in tune again, eh, George?" gloats Maurice, realizing he has the upper hand. "Maurice, you must do this! You have never failed me," George implores. "I have never failed you because you were my brains, but you aren't anymore. You're like all the other clever ones—clever until they meet a woman and then they suddenly become fools and the law gets them, standing still with a longing look in their eyes," counters Maurice. (Is it wholly coincidental that Maurice is describing George in much the same terms that George used to describe his last wife?) Recognizing defeat, George concedes, "Maurice, if you'll go to Midbury, I'll listen to you. I'll do anything you say." "Anything?" asks Maurice. "Anything," agrees George, knowing full well what that obviously entails. "That's better, George. All right, I'll go, but when I come back we stick to our original plan and forget all about Quito and Ecuador and the Valentine," concludes Maurice.

What is so very intriguing about this scene is the fact that the homosexual aspect of the relationship is not only blatant in the scripting but also in the playing (Kosleck is brilliant as the spurned lover) and the direction. (It is extremely significant that the pair's actual goodbye takes place off-camera.) It may have escaped the notice of the censors, but everyone else involved seems to have been in on it—though Kosleck always denied it.

At this point, *THE MAD DOCTOR* becomes enmeshed in wrapping up the plot, which is certainly deftly and enjoyably accomplished, most especially owing to the performance of an unusually benign Ralph Morgan as the crusty old medico ("Everybody who lives in Midbury becomes weird and strange") out to snare George. Unfortu-

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Martin Kosleck took a break from playing Nazis for what is arguably his best role in horror movies: Maurice Gretz, the homicidal lover of Dr. George Sebastian (Basil Rathbone), also known as **THE MAD DOCTOR**.

nately, no aspect of this final section comes near the level of interest generated by the scenes leading up to it. All told, the film is ultimately more interesting than outright good, though the production values—not to mention a wonderful Victor Young score—are a little higher than average, thanks to redressed standing sets and fluid camerawork by Paramount's lenser-of-all-trades Ted Tetzlaff. Tim Whelan's direction is effective without being especially showy. The big scene between Rathbone and Kosleck is a model of directorial precision, though, so his contribution to making **THE MAD DOCTOR** one of the most fascinatingly perverse Paramount horrors of the forties should not be overlooked.

More overt horror is to be found in the studio's next effort, **THE MONSTER AND THE GIRL**. It boasts more traditional elements of horror in that it features the splendid George Zucco as a medical enthusiast bent on popping the brain of a man into the skull of a gorilla. Just why he—or anyone else, for that matter—would want to do this is open to question, but it drives the film's plot, which manages to both rip off . . . err, borrow much of the concept of Michael Curtiz' **THE WALKING DEAD** (1936), so much so that the film might have been called **THE BANANA-EATING DEAD**. Both films share the plot of a wrongly executed man brought back to life by a well-meaning scientist, thereby allowing the dead man to revenge himself on his tormentors. Zucco, Charlie Gemora in his ape suit, general mayhem, and the sleaziest of plots—who could ask for anything more? The surprise is that, asked for or not, one gets more with **THE MONSTER AND THE GIRL**, which, upon reappraisal, is one of the better horror films of the forties.

Even admitting the shortcomings of the film's basic premise, **THE MONSTER AND THE GIRL** is stylish to a fault, thanks to the masterful direction of Stuart Heisler and the brilliant cinematography of one of Paramount's finest cameramen, Victor Milner, aided and abetted by Hans

Dreier's clever use of recycled sets, which manages to make them look fresh and even sumptuous. More, the film is wonderfully cast—sometimes against our expectations—all the way down the line. Of course, for the horror fan, Zucco is the main draw, despite the fact that his screen time is fairly minimal and he's given an atypically sympathetic role (not so much a mad doc as an overenthusiastic one). The rest of the cast is just as good. Ellen Drew's performance as "fallen woman" Susan Webster may well be the best thing the always dependable, but rarely dynamic actress ever did. The casting of Paul Lukas as the ringleader is an excellent choice, while Marc Lawrence and Gerald Mohr are perfect minions. The real delights, though, are Joseph Calleia as Deacon, possibly the creepiest gangster ever to pack a gat and, cast very much against type, Robert Paige as Larry Reed, the gang's resident lounge lizard. If finding the usually likable Paige playing a loathesome rat is a surprise, then it's a positive shock to discover the rougher Phillip Terry (whose private life undeniably colors our view of his performances) playing Susan's innocent, churchgoing, organ-playing, goodie-goodie brother, whose execution on trumped-up charges leads to his becoming the world's first brain donor. Rounding out the leads is Onslow Stevens as the wrong-headed district attorney who helps send Scot Webster to his date with the electric chair. It is an entirely unsympathetic part and Stevens plays it to perfection.

While possessing more than its fair share of logic lapses, Stuart Anthony's screenplay is not a bad one. It is nicely structured with a methodical build up, leading to a genuinely effective climax that both satisfies our expectations and manages a surprise in terms of tone and what it does not do. The script and direction are remarkably grim, an aspect of the film that is not lessened by the inclusion of a cute little dog, Skipper, in the framework. Again, the story is sensationalistic—almost to the point that it skirts the

realm of the actual "cautionary" exploitation films of the era. The plot hinges entirely on Susan's decision to quit her rustic existence (despite the perhaps peculiar desire on the part of brother Scot that they set up housekeeping together) for the thrills of The City, and, naturally, The City is not a nice place. This is nothing terribly out of the ordinary, but the manner of her fall from grace is another matter—and one that would have been far more at home in pre-code Hollywood than 1941. Susan meets and falls for Larry, marrying him almost at once. What she doesn't know is that Larry is the front man for a prostitution ring and that the wedding ceremony is a bogus one performed by Deacon. When Susan wakes up after her wedding night, she finds herself sans husband, but with a whopping hotel bill and an "offer" of a job as a call girl for W.S. Bruhl (Paul Lukas)—this as an alternative to being jailed for non-payment. These are the circumstances that bring Scot to The City and lead to his being framed for murder by Bruhl, his execution, and ultimately the placement of his brain in the noggin of a gorilla. (A cautionary tale, indeed!) So remember, girls, unless you want a future in the "white slavery" industry and a murderous, possibly incestuous simian for a brother, stay away from the enticements of The City!

Silly as some of this undeniably sounds, the conviction of the players and the atmospheric direction make the difference and raise the film way out of the ordinary. The film's general aura is surprisingly like that of the Lewton films—a year before there were any Lewton films—only with more in the way of traditional horror elements and an onscreen "monster." In many ways, the film is very much like *THE SEVENTH VICTIM* (1944), while never quite being in that league. There is an almost tangible atmosphere of gloominess about *THE MONSTER AND THE GIRL* from the very beginning, with Ellen Drew walking out of the fog to address the camera and set the mood: "I'm Susan, the bad luck penny. I bought a million dollars worth of trouble for everybody. I reached so hard for the stars that I forgot to look where I was walking. I wonder how things would be if . . ." Daring and certainly an unusual approach, her little speech sets the film's fatalistic tone, even though it doesn't make a great deal of sense. ("I wonder how things would be if . . ." leads directly into the story of how things got to be as they actually are!)

What is perhaps most surprising about *THE MONSTER AND THE GIRL* is the careful buildup before anything remotely horrific happens. The story and the characterizations are given full sway (along with some powerhouse histrionics from Drew, Terry, and Stevens) until Scot lands in the death house and is paid a visit by our genial "mad doctor," who has watched Scot's trial with somewhat vulturistic intent. Being a law-abiding loony, Dr. Parry (Zucco) goes about his business through the proper channels and with the utmost decency. (One presumes he has not, however, informed the authorities as to the exact reason he wants Scot's brain.) "As the warden told you, I have a favor to ask. I am a doctor—a scientist, they call me. For an experiment that I am hoping to complete, I need the brain of a man—a strong, healthy brain. Believe me, your help could be of infinite importance to the human race," he tells Scot. "The human race? I owe it a lot, don't I?" asks the much put-upon Scot. "Don't you understand? It's the mistakes of the human race we're trying to correct," urges Parry. Not convinced, but not much caring anyway, Scot agrees to pass on his grey matter once the state finishes frying it to a golden brown. (It never occurs to anyone that electrocution might in some minor way damage the tissue.)

In the scenes that follow, *THE MONSTER AND THE GIRL* scores in the style department with a splendid long shot of the prison in the fog, the execution beautifully conveyed by having a guard at the gate correct the time on his watch to midnight when the lights dim, Dr. Parry and his ambulance driver moving the body to his obligatory mansion (a splendid bit of model work), and the business in the

mansion itself, including the experiment. From the moment Parry and the driver wheel the body and its support system into the house, the film makes nary a false step, with the camera gliding through impressive sets (made more so by being underlit) and into a fine laboratory, where Parry's assistant, Gregory (an unbilled Abner Biberman), has their hirsute friend ready and waiting. "He should be proud when he wakes up with a human brain," enthuses Gregory, mindless of the fact that, without his own brain, the ape is unlikely to have much sense of self. "This night's dreaming will step him up a million years in the pattern of evolution," beams Parry, who seems similarly oblivious to the fact that all he's really going to have is a large monkey with Scot Webster's brain. "Gregory, look! The human brain—even more than the human heart, is God's greatest handiwork. Millions and millions of cells and each cell a treasure house in which is guarded its own store of human passion, wit and wisdom, sin and repentance, envy, hatred, greed—and love." "Yes, but the ape—will he know all that?" wonders Gregory. "When he gives us the answer to that we shall have a new chapter in scientific history," answers Parry, without yet giving us a clue as to what this is supposed to accomplish—unless it's like mountain climbing ("Why did you transplant that brain into a gorilla?" "Because it was there!") The operation itself utilizes a very effective montage to convey the sense of something marvelously scientific going on.

The experiment is a success. "Look at the expression in the eyes, Gregory. It's almost a human understanding." Unfortunately for whatever loopy reason this has been done, Scot in his gorilla incarnation clearly does remember his human past, and his courtroom vow to exact vengeance on those responsible for his execution. The memory so inflames him that he rips his way out of the cage and sets off to do just that. Interestingly, this bit of excitement is suggested rather than shown. We hear the ape break out, but only see the aftermath of his rage. This is the approach to most of the film's violence, with the bulk of the mayhem taking place offscreen—an effective gambit that helps preserve audience sympathy for the ape. No sooner is Scot loose than the prosecuting attorney turns up inexplicably dead—every bone in his body broken, according to the medical examiner (George Meader). This is the one area in which the script is seriously open to question, because the attorney, while certainly overzealous in prosecuting the case, is hardly one of the central bad guys. Still, since the event unfolds offscreen, it passes largely unnoticed. The ape's subsequent killings are more justifiable and even satisfying, as one by one, he dispatches the gang members. This section of the film is filled with nice touches that make all the difference between a run of the mill killer-monkey flick and a minor classic. The shots of the ape stalking across the rooftops are especially striking, with the camera angled down so that it follows both Scot and the action on the street (especially the dog, which recognizes the ape as his late master, following below). The scene in which Deacon shoots the already crushed-to-death Sleeper (Lawrence) and then carefully tunes the radio to an appropriately funereal tune before being crushed himself is chilling on a number of levels.

One of the more interesting aspects of this final section is that here and only here the film injects a degree of dry wit, with Dr. Parry, who has (somewhat inexplicably) been following the murders, opting to inform a patented dumb movie cop (Emory Parnell) about what's really going on. "I'm about to do something for you—something you could never do for yourself. Tomorrow you'll be promoted—a hero—for tonight I shall tell you the identity of the 'Mangle Murderer.' You're looking for an ape with a human brain. When you've found him, there'll be an end to the mangle killings." Of course, even dumb movie cops have credulity limits and Parry's information sorely tests this particular

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Our Man on Baker Street

By David Stuart Davies

Putting Sherlock on Stage Part Two

So now we had a play. I was happy with it. The actor Roger Llewellyn was happy with it. And the proposed director, Gareth Armstrong, was happy with it. However, as any writer knows, having a product to give to the public is only half of the problem. The other half is getting it accepted. In the case of a play, one needs a production company to back and promote it. Before we could even begin the task of interesting anyone in taking on our sure-fire hit, Roger was struck with a mysterious debilitating illness. From the usual vibrant and enthusiastic fellow I had come to know, he grew listless and insecure. Sadly, he had to put his career on hold while the medics got to the bottom of his malaise. He turned down work and he decided that it would be unfair to go with Sherlock. This was a blow to me because it wasn't that I had just lost an actor, I had lost the actor—the one who was ideal casting for the part. Given that Jeremy Brett was no longer around, I could think of no one else suited to the role as I had written it.

That was the 1997/98 winter—the winter of my discontent. I had no entrée in the British theatre world and, although I tried several agents with my play, I got nowhere. The agents were all complimentary regarding the text, but stated that I would need to interest an actor—preferably a well-known actor—in the part before the project could be considered.

Gareth was good to me. There were the odd E-mails saying *nil desperandum*. He

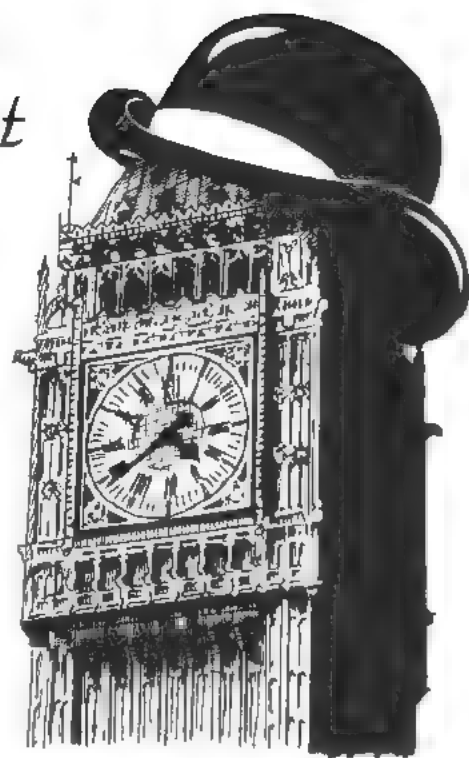
even showed a copy of the script to the actor Martin Jarvis, who liked it—but no way was he going to tie himself down to a one-man play in the theatre when he could earn much more money on television, film, or with his very successful talking books company. And then, come again, fate entered the lists. Gareth had written his own one-man show. Ironically, it was called *SHYLOCK*; it dealt with the persecution of the Jews throughout history. Despite the seriousness of the topic, this was a wonderful roller-coaster of a show which by turns was hilarious and tear-jerking, and Gareth gave a marvelous performance. So successful was the show that it went on the road, visiting small theatres and other venues across the quilted garden of Britain. For this endeavour, Gareth needed a roadie—someone to help him set out the props, work the lighting, etc. He asked Roger if he'd do it. Still resting from acting and still fairly lethargic, Roger agreed. "It will be good therapy for him," Gareth E-mailed me. And so it proved.

SHYLOCK came to a venue near to where I live, so my wife, Kathryn, and I went along to see and applaud the show. Afterwards we had dinner with Gareth and Roger. What a change there was in my actor. He was virtually bubbling with fun and gossip. It certainly looked as though he was on the mend. At one point during the meal, Gareth leaned over to me and whispered in my ear, "Don't give up on Sherlock. Roger will come back to it."

And so he did.

Sometime in the Summer of '98, I received an ebullient phone call from Roger. "I'm going to do Sherlock and if we can't get anybody interested in producing it, I'll do it myself." I was wary. I didn't want to pop a champagne cork immediately. I didn't know how serious he was. I hoped that he had recovered, but I worried that this exuberance may only be a break in the clouds. But he was as good as his word.

Through Roger's efforts and contacts, several small production companies became interested in the play initially, but nothing worked out. One producer liked



the play so much that he wanted to re-write it! Another was very keen to put it on, but his percentages to both actor and playwright were laughable. So Roger dipped into his own savings and formed Jay Productions. Gareth persuaded Salisbury Playhouse to cover 50 percent of the original production costs, with a run at this theatre in May 1999. Sherlock was to become a reality at last.

The play was also going to the Edinburgh Festival in August—a prospect that did not thrill Roger very much. A crowded city with hundreds of shows and too many student dramas for him, I'm afraid, but taking the show to the Festival certainly thrilled me. It had been a long-held ambition of mine to be part of the wonderful international arts festival.

I visited Salisbury on the penultimate day of rehearsals—Roger's birthday. I watched a performance of my play with half a set, no lighting, and Roger wearing a pink shirt and jeans. God, I thought, this looks awful. I asked Gareth if he believed that there was enough in the first act to prompt the audience to return after the interval. He laughed. "Of course, don't worry! Don't worry!" It was like telling Cary Grant to stop looking handsome.

I live in Yorkshire and the Salisbury Playhouse is in Wiltshire—300 miles away. It was a trek for that first night, especially when your stomach is knotted and your head is pounding and you keep having visions of Sherlock Holmes in a pink shirt and jeans.

It was a full house, which in a studio theatre means about 130 people. The lights dimmed and then came the first delight of the evening: Simon Slater's wonderful music. It was modern and yet darkly evocative of the Victorian period. On came Roger. On came Holmes. He was not in a pink shirt and jeans, but in a frock coat and striped trousers. Then came the sound effects which lifted and

Roger Llewellyn shares a laugh with Michael Cox, who brought Sherlock Holmes to television in the eighties with Jeremy Brett as the Great Detective.



Photo by David Stuart Davies

embroidered the text. Roger was in his element at last!

At the interval, I roamed the bar area like some authorial spy trying to catch snatches of conversation. Were the audience enjoying the play? I caught nothing. Kathryn was bolder and more honest. She asked a group what they thought of the play and, when they said they were enjoying it, added with a proud smile, "My husband is the writer."

As I settled down for the second act, I looked around the theatre and observed, "Well, they've all come back."

The play was a success. The review printed in the local press stated that Roger was "an actor of rare power." It also made a point that cheered me immensely: "David Stuart Davies' play enthrals those of us with only a passing acquaintance with the detective and satisfied Holmes devotees." That is what I aimed to do!

The play played various venues before it arrived for a three week stint in Edinburgh in August. Here it received a five star review in the *Edinburgh Evening News*: "Roger Llewellyn's unmissable tour-de-force... an incisive and often unexpectedly poignant play, superbly directed by Gareth Armstrong."

Fortuitous for the fortune of the play was the erection of a statue to the Great Detective in Baker Street in September of 1999. Surrounding this event was a Sherlock Holmes Festival organized by the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, designed to cater for the many Sherlockian visitors to London to witness the unveil-

ing of the statue. This prompted Roger to book a fringe theatre for a three week run during September. Opening night was fun. It was great to see the veteran actor Douglas Wilmer—a famed Sherlock Holmes himself, on his feet applauding at the end. "You devil," Douglas said to me afterwards, referring to the script, "You made me cry."

Unfortunately, the theatre only presented plays intermittently and was up a cul de sac off Marylebone Road and therefore had no regular or passing trade. After the opening night, attendances fluctuated greatly during the run, but for the week of the Festival it did a great business and on the Saturday night there was a gala performance. The 150 seat theatre squeezed nearly 200 Sherlockians into the auditorium. People sat on the stairs and on ledges to watch Roger give a bravura performance and at the end the audience stood as one man to applaud him. He then brought me down to share some of the kudos. It was a wonderful experience; indeed Roger said later that it was the crowning moment of his theatrical career—adding with a knowing look, "so far."

Despite the fluctuating audiences, the play received wonderful reviews. For example the listing magazine *What's On in London* said: "From Basil Rathbone to Jeremy Brett there have been many fine portrayals of Conan Doyle's greatest creation. The name of Roger Llewellyn can now be added to the distinguished list... Davies' incisive, elegant and at times moving script..."



Sherlock Holmes met Sherlock Holmes when Roger Llewellyn posed with the statue of Sherlock in Edinburgh.

And so the play goes on. It was performed for the Baker Street Irregulars in New York this January (with *Scarlet* editors Richard Valley and Tom Amorosi in attendance) and then Roger flew off to Detroit to discuss plans for an autumn tour in the States. If this comes off and the play arrives at a venue near you, do go and see it.

Photo courtesy of David Stuart Davies

The Man Who Hunted Jack the Ripper

Edmund Reid and the Police Perspective

By Nicholas Connell and Stewart P
Evans

Introduction by Richard Whittington-Egan

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Nicholas Connell and Stewart P Evans
Introduction by Richard Whittington-Egan

Host to Said Ghosts The Thorne Smith Story

by Michael D. Walker

*My husband he did it The devil would drive,
The high flying, low lying soak.
And that is the reason I'm no longer alive,
For he drove me smack into an oak.*

—Marion Kerby

He was a friend and contemporary of such writers as James Thurber and Sinclair Lewis. None of his 16 books ever topped the best-sellers list, but his work has remained so popular with the public over the past 70 years that he has outsold nearly all of his more critically acclaimed peers. He was Dorothy Parker's friend and lover during her formative years as a writer, but neither she nor her fellow Algonquin Round Table wits so much as even mentioned him in any of their many writings regarding those historic years of the Roaring Twenties. His name was Thorne Smith.

New York City's writing scene in the 1920s and 1930s flourished with creative ambition the likes of which the world hasn't seen since. Lewis, Thurber, Parker, Robert Benchley, Alexander Woollcott, Ring Lardner, Robert Sherwood, and more called Greenwich Village their home. They drew publicity while F. Scott Fitzgerald and others gathered critical praise, but quietly in their midst Thorne Smith practiced his magic: selling 40,000 copies each of his first two books, *Biltmore Oswald* and *Out O' Luck*, while also being published in H. L. Mencken's *The Smart Set*. But it wasn't until 1926 that he broke free from the shadows of his more famous friends, when he took the traditional ghost story and set it permanently on its ear with *Topper*.

Today's audiences think nothing out of the ordinary about *BETTER LATE THAN NEVER* (1988) or *CASPER THE FRIENDLY*

GHOST (1995), or the romantic supernatural possibilities of *GHOST* (1990) or *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME* (1998), but prior to *Topper* most ghost stories were unsettling tales in the Wilkie Collins or M.R. James tradition. Thorne Smith would forever change our relationship to ghosts and the supernatural by breaking every rule of logic and convention with his stories.

A Man in Body Only

Topper is the story of mild-mannered, repressed banker Cosmo Topper, a man who "could not be troubled. His mental process ran safely, smoothly, and on the dot along well signaled tracks; and his physical activities, such as they were, obeyed without question an inelastic schedule of suburban domesticity. He resented being troubled. At least he thought he did." His well-ordered life begins to unravel when he buys a car formerly owned by a young married couple, George and Marion Kerby, who were always ready to party at the drop of a cocktail. The Kerbys had died when George lost control of their vehicle during a drunken joy ride and crashed into a tree. Unwilling to ascend to a higher plane of existence, the Kerbys take it upon themselves to haunt Topper.

Unlike the spirits in traditional Gothic tales, who rattle chains and frighten us at night, the Kerbys are jovial ghosts who've lost none of their zest for life's pleasures. They drink, dance, and sing and before long they have Topper doing the same, eliciting in him the belief that "I think I could learn how to live." As Topper's adventures develop, so does his relationship with Marion Kerby, and he falls in love with her. She is everything his dull and

stuffy wife isn't: vibrant, funny, and flirtatious. She even understands the sadness in his eyes: "Perhaps they've looked on loveliness too late, the world does wicked things to us with its success and routine and morality. Topper, it either cheats us with wealth or numbs us with want, steals away from us all the color and wonder of being alive, the necessary useless things."

The novel concludes with Marion at last leaving for that higher plane and Topper acknowledging the impact she has made: "You've created happiness in me, you've awakened dreams and left memories. You've made me humble and you've made me human. You've taught me to understand how a man with a hangover feels. You've lifted me forever out of the rut of my smug existence. I'll go back to it I know, but I won't be the same man." Marion reminds him, "You never were. You were never intended to be."

Topper's popularity stemmed from several sources. Its initial success can partly be attributed to the novel appearing six years into Prohibition and thus providing a vicarious outlet for those unhappy with the hypocrisy of the law. However, the explosive success of its reprinting by Pocket Books in the 1940s (over two million in sales, more than doubling its sales during "The Great Drought") and its continued success through this past year's Modern Library edition can more accurately be seen as a testament to Thorne Smith's genius in calling to the repressed spirit that resides in all of us.

Another vital element of *Topper* is its most singular creation, Marion Kerby. She is a self-assured, independent woman. Yes, she's a ghost, but make no mistake, she is also a modern woman—though a bit on the ectoplasmic side. She is the first of many strong, free-spirited women Thorne Smith brought to literature well before there was a feminist movement. She takes her wedding vows, particularly "till death do us part," quite literally. Upon dying, she sees no reason to tolerate her husband's callous and indifferent ways and begins to playfully go after what she wants: her man Topper.

Marion is the mold from which Smith would create all of his leading female characters. One of the trademarks of a Thorne Smith story is the use of a powerful woman as a catalyst for the life-altering changes that occur in a man's life. While this innovative portrayal of women all too often went unnoticed or ignored by critics, it was recognized by the female population, including Grace Bradley, who named her husband William "Hopalong Cassidy" Boyd's horse Topper in honor of her favorite novels.

Local Historians Disagree

Getting a firm handle on Thorne Smith's life is as difficult as grabbing one of his elusive ghosts. He was born James Thorne Smith Jr. on March 27, 1892, at Annapolis. His father, James Thorne Smith Sr., was a Commodore in the Navy. The mythology begins immediately thereafter, with rumors of Thorne being misplaced shortly after his birth by a drunken nursemaid. (Possibly apocryphal, the anecdote fits well with the stories Smith would later write and the tales others would tell about him. It's just the sort of thing

he might have appreciated.) It is likely that Smith had only a hazy, apparition-like memory of his mother, who died unexpectedly in 1896 and left the Commodore with eight-year-old Skyring and four-year-old Thorne. The Commodore soon called on a succession of family members to care for his sons while he was at sea. Little of these constant moves from relative to relative was ever documented, though Smith seemed most fond of his time with a North Carolina cousin named Almerine and a large family dog named Zeb, with both of whom he shared a bed. From there he was sent to the Locust Dale Academy, a boarding school in Virginia, then later on to prep school at St. Luke's in Wayne, Pennsylvania. Following his graduation in 1910, Smith enrolled at Dartmouth, where he grew tired of the requisite courses that interfered with his desire to concentrate solely on literature and social sciences.

He left Dartmouth after his sophomore year and began a series of jobs with advertising agencies in New York City. During the summers, he would frequently spend time with his father at the Montowese Hotel in Branford, Connecticut. It was there that he met and became friends with Dorothy Rothschild, the unconventional woman who would become known as Dorothy Parker and was very likely a source of inspiration for Marion Kerby.

Smith and Dorothy were an ideal match, their sharp wits and literary ambitions drawing them together. An acquaintance, John D. McMaster, remembered that "Thorne and Dorothy were the wits of the place. Thorne liked his liquor even then, and his jokes were ribald. The highlight of the week came on Sundays, when he and Dorothy and the latter's brother conducted a 'Sunday School Class' for the youngsters. They would act out Jonah and the Whale, Potiphar's wife, Daniel in the Lion's Den, Salome, and so on."

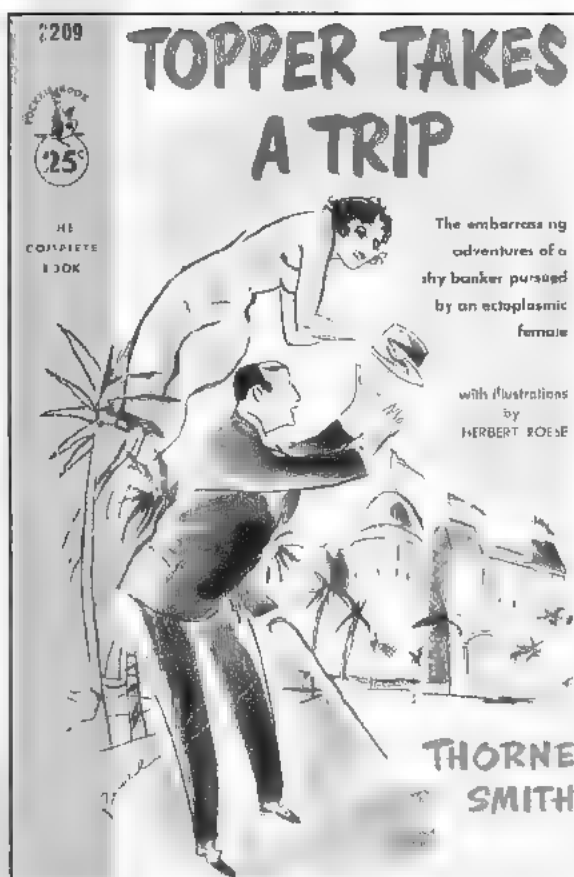
They also had separate rooms in the same boarding house at 103rd and Broadway in Manhattan. Smith would often venture up to Dorothy's room, where they

would read each other's poetry, discuss their ambitions, and make love. She would later recall those days: "We were both as poor as church mice, the kind that eat little but squeak a lot." His poetry hadn't seen print yet; however, some of her verse was published in Franklin P. Adams' column in the *New York World*. Adams' contributors weren't paid much, if at all, but this didn't dampen the spirits of the two young lovers. Dorothy remembered, "There was no money, but Jesus we had fun."

Shortly thereafter she was summoned to Condé Nast and offered a position on *Vogue's* staff. The first person she sought out was Smith and they celebrated the good news. As her life became busier, their romance cooled down. They remained friends, though it wasn't long before Dorothy began seeing Eddie Parker. She became Dorothy Parker in June of 1917. Within six months of her wedding, both Eddie Parker and Thorne Smith left to serve in the military.

The Inevitable Draws Near

During his stint in the Navy, Smith got himself assigned as editor of the Naval Reserve publication *The Broadside*. He





used the opportunity to perfect his comedic skills, detailing sometimes true, sometimes exaggerated episodes of his military training. In 1918, Frederick A. Stokes Company published them as the book *Biltmore Oswald*. The humorous misadventures of the recruit sold well and were followed up by a second popular collection, *Out O' Luck*, in 1919.

The books remain fun reading and were clearly templates for the successful *Sad Sack* and *Beetle Bailey* comic strips.

Buoyed by the end of the War and his newfound success, Smith eloped in August with a young woman he'd been seeing, Celia Sullivan, who was 10 years his junior. Happily, Celia encouraged his literary ambitions and helped where possible. (He always wrote longhand and she would type up his efforts, preparing them to be sent to the magazines.) Smith had been publishing his own poetry in *The Broadside*, and even had a poem find its way into H. L. Menckner's *The Smart Set*. This was followed by Stokes releasing a collection of Smith's poetry titled *Haunts & By-paths*. The book received few reviews and sold poorly. Dismayed by the failure of his more serious work, Smith returned once more to advertising copywriting to support himself and his new bride.

The Body Is Viewed Without Favor

The advertising world had never seen anything like Thorne Smith. Unfortunately, he saw little in advertising—though he liked a steady paycheck. He quickly earned a reputation for creating imaginative, quality copy in a fraction of the time others required, but also began a habit of absenteeism due to "colds." Some of the truancy stemmed from spending time on his own literary efforts, but increasingly they were a result of his late night binges with the bottle. Achieving success so rapidly with his first two books, only to see a string of rejections thereafter, depressed him. Frances Goodfellow, a colleague from those days, remembered Smith as "the enfant terrible of the organization. He had a habit of leaving a sober piece of financial advertising copy in the middle of a sentence and disappearing for weeks. The executives all seemed to have proper respect for his ability because he was never fired, but was always received with open arms when he returned." On one occasion, Smith arrived at work to find the office staff in a mad scramble to produce an advertisement with a two-hour deadline looming over them. After learning the nature of the copy needed, he retreated from the scene only to return several minutes later with not one but three ads he'd created in short order. The copy executive selected one and sent it by messenger to avert the near disaster.

For all his skills in the field, Thorne's frustration with this form of employment grew in direct proportion to the number of rejection slips he received for his serious literary efforts. He called advertising "the graveyard of literary aspiration in which the spirits of the defeated aspirants, wielding a momentary power over a public that rejected their efforts, blackjack it into buying the most amazing assortment of purely useless and cheaply manufactured commodities that has ever marked the decline of culture and common sense."

In late August 1920, as Thorne and Celia prepared to celebrate their first anniversary, the Commodore died suddenly during a visit with Thorne's older brother. The loss was a deep shock. Less than a year earlier, Smith had dedicated *Haunts & By-paths* to him with a simple but heartfelt "To The Commodore—God Bless Him!" The Commodore had left some money for his sons, money which Thorne and Celia eventually used to finance a trip to Southern France in 1921 and later to buy property in Free Acres, a single-tax community in New Jersey.

At the time, the Smiths lived on Jones Street, where one of their neighbors was Harold Stearns, former editor of *The Dial* and author of *Liberalism in America*. Stearns was working on a new idea, a symposium to be titled *Civilization in the United States* featuring essays on various aspects of American life, each composed by a noted writer/expert in his or her particular field. Smith would often spend evenings with Stearns and the other writers being recruited for the project. In this manner, he came to know Conrad Aiken, Lewis Mumford, Van Wyck Brooks, and George Nathan. When it came time to find a wordsmith to tackle the chapter on advertising, Stearns had to look no further than his neighbor.

Civilization in the United States was published in 1922 and drew a lot of attention. Even American writers living abroad—Sinclair Lewis, for example—wired their publishers asking for a copy. The attention didn't turn Thorne Smith into a household name, but it did gain him notoriety. After all, he was quite literally biting the hand that fed him—his honest criticism and mocking tone exposed the very industry in which he made his living. Luckily, Edwin B. Wilson, the president of the agency Smith worked for, stood by him during the negative backlash, even when the president of a large New York advertising agency suggested he be fired for what he wrote.

Later that year, Thorne and Celia began a pattern of spending their summers on their one acre in Free Acres, then returning to a Greenwich Village apartment for the winter months. In November of 1922 their first daughter, Marion, was born. She was followed in March of 1924 by a second daughter, June. Thorne loved his daughters dearly, but the added responsibility of two children further taxed his income and emphasized his inability to manage his money. In March 1925, he left Edwin B. Wilson, Incorporated, for a better paying position with Inecto, Incorporated, but this arrangement lasted all of seven months.

During the next six months of unemployment, Thorne put everything he had into an overly descriptive, dreamlike love story involving a poet and a haunting woman he desires. *Dream's End* was a sharp contrast to the misadventures of *Biltmore Oswald*. He sent the serious drama to four major publishers. Each rejected the novel outright. Stunned, he picked up a short story idea he'd begun toying with two years earlier. He decided to expand it into a novel and sent it around. To his surprise, *Topper* was accepted and published by Robert M. McBride and Company on February 13, 1926. The drought between books had ended. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Thorne submitted *Dream's End* to McBride. Again they said yes and gave the novel a boost with this trade announcement: "Only once in a decade comes a novel like this! A story that enchants you—as a beautiful dream! Simple ingredients—Two women, one of the flesh, one of the spirit, and a man struggling between love and desire. But when you've finished, you say, Oh, what a book! And vow to read it soon again. By Thorne Smith—Thorne Smith, who wrote *Topper*, now ready to head the list of first-rate American novelists."

Unfortunately the critics skewered *Dream's End* and the reading public avoided it with an enthusiasm far exceeding McBride's optimism. Smith couldn't understand the book's commercial and critical failure. He held a deep-rooted desire to be taken as seriously as his friends Sinclair Lewis, H. L. Menckner, and Ring Lardner.



PREVIOUS PAGE: Topper's creator, Thorne Smith. LEFT: Holy mackerel! Neptune (Robert Warwick) pays a visit to the fish market and tangles with Roigi (Henry Armetta) in *NIGHT LIFE OF THE GODS* (1935). RIGHT: Cosmo Topper (Roland Young) is astonished to meet the former owners of his car, George and Marion Kerby (Cary Grant and Constance Bennett) mainly because they're dead!

A Decidedly Different Something

Following the literary dream's end, Smith took to writing advertising once more, despising himself for backtracking and struggling to control his drinking, which resulted in periodic weekend episodes during which he'd lock himself in a room and drown his depression with an entire bottle of gin or whatever was handy. Just when all seemed lost, Joe Anthony of the Cosmopolitan Book Corporation offered him a contract to write a humorous book in the same vein as *Topper*. The contract allowed him to quit his job and take Celia and the girls to the French Riviera, where he set to work on the novel.

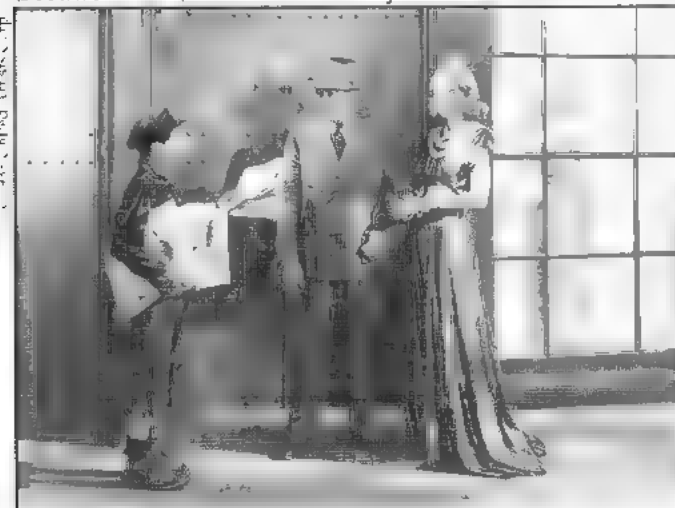
The Stray Lamb (1929) follows the adventures of T. Lawrence Lamb, an investment broker commuting his dull and predictable life away aboard the "hurtling slave galleys of progress." Lamb's complacency is disturbed by a peculiar little man who bestows on him the ability to change into an assortment of animals. While Smith never states so, the little fellow is most likely a leprechaun (James Stephens' *The Crock of Gold*, an Irish fantasy novel published in 1912, was one of Smith's favorite books.) The female protagonist, a younger version of Marion Kerby, is Sandra Rush, a friend of Lamb's daughter. Among the novel's funniest moments

is Lamb's stint as a horse. Besides creating enough chaos for three stories, he performs tricks, such as drinking and reading a novel over Sandra's shoulder, stopping her premature page-turning with his hoof. If it sounds like MR. ED or FRANCIS THE TALKING MULE m.schiefe, you're not mistaken. Arthur Lubin created both Ed and Francis, and intentionally or not, owes much to *The Stray Lamb*.

The novel is also rich with sly and clever dialogue between Sandra and Lamb, though a newfound maturity underlies the banter. When Lamb becomes a bizarre combination of animals, Sandra tries to assure the worried creature that she's stood by him through his animal incarnations because she's drawn to the man inside, not the outer shell. One can't help but also read this as an acknowledgment by Smith to his wife for standing by him through his various incarnations as a sailor, successful writer, advertising man, dejected author, and alcoholic battling his personal demons.

There are a few notable departures from the bulk of the Smith canon. One somber chapter is seen from Lamb's point of view as a weary dog wandering about town, his path crossing the darker side of life. A scene within the same chapter harshly displays a man drinking himself to

LEFT: Constance Bennett was back as Marion Kerby for *TOPPER TAKES A TRIP* (1939), but Cary Grant had moved on to other things. Here, Topper (Roland Young) and Marion get the latest news on Toppy's divorce case. RIGHT: Jennifer (Veronica Lake) is dead, but she's been dead before. Dr. Dudley White (Robert Benchley) and Wallace Wooley (Fredric March) examine the body in *I MARRIED A WITCH* (1942).



death while his inebriated wife has sex with another man in the next room. (Oddly enough, critics often cite Smith's lack of severe consequences for his merry tipplers as one of the writer's faults. Somehow they missed this sequence.)

Finally, there's a striking sequence near the end of the novel. Lamb has morphed into a hybrid and is hunted down by vigilantes. (A similar scenario occurs near the end of *Skin and Bones*.) The scene is a remarkable precursor to *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1935), with a halfwitted man befriending Lamb and vainly trying to fend off the angry villagers, just as the hermit does for the Monster in *BRIDE*. Captured, Lamb transforms back into a man on an examining table, only to have a group of scientists beg him to change back into the hybrid so they can dissect him and learn the secret of his transformation. ("All I can say, is that as you were, you were a great gain to science and that as you are, you are not much of a contribution to the human race.") In their ghoulish excitement, one disappointed scientist even suggests they dissect him anyway—"There must be something strange inside him," he says, an allusion to comments Smith often heard regarding himself. While *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* was a horror film seasoned with comedy, *Lamb* is a fantasy with occasional shadows of darkness lurking beneath the humor.

The Stray Lamb was greeted with favorable reviews and a letter from actor Roland Young, who asked Smith if he'd let Young act as his agent. Young hoped to sell the movie rights for *The Stray Lamb* to another actor who was thoroughly taken with the novel. Smith agreed to the deal and shortly thereafter received three thousand dollars from John Barrymore, no stranger to transformation (He had played DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE in 1920). Young and Smith continued their correspondence, becoming close friends for the remainder of Smith's life. Barrymore never did get the film version of *The Stray Lamb* made, but it's intriguing to imagine what he might have done with the material.

Smith wasted no time writing a second novel for *Cosmopolitan*. *Did She Fall* initially appeared in the pages of *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1930 prior to its release in book form. The novel is the oddest of ducks, beginning with the reasoning that "More than one poor mortal has decorated a rope end, sat fleetingly but finally in a hot chair, or moldered for life in a cell, whose single act of violence has really benefited society or some part of it. The worst that can be said of him is that he has set it a questionable example. Of course life could not continue to muddle along under a regime of murder at random, a system of salutary but unsolicited removals. This cannot be for the simple reason that almost every one of us during the course of his or her life deserves to be murdered at least once..."

The plot revolves around the death of Emily-Jane Seabrook, a vicious soul whose manipulative conduct results in her murder among an elite group of suspects, all of

whom wished her dead. The novel's pacing is maddeningly slow despite several clever developments, including the evolution of a painting of the crime scene by Emily-Jane's fiancée, Barney.

Did She Fall would be Smith's lone attempt at a mystery, a genre he enjoyed reading. The novel did well, though it annoyed mystery purists, who objected to Smith's unconventional use of the format to frame his social satire of upper-crust society. Whereas the earlier rejection of *Dream's End* had been personally devastating, not even a stinging

review of *Did She Fall* by mystery master Dashiell Hammett fazed Thorne. Curiously, Hammett strayed from his own hard-boiled rules in much the same manner, when in 1934 when he wrote *The Thin Man*, which spawned six comedy/mystery films, a radio show, and a TV series. The movies centered on Nick and Nora Charles, a married couple who, when not solving murders, drank and verbally sparred in much the same manner as *Topper's* George and Marion Kerby.

The Lost Domino

The Smiths' inability to manage their finances reoccurred as income from the two novels tapered off. Smith dreaded the thought of writing ads again. His friend, James Thurber, who wrote a column for *The New Yorker* magazine, introduced him to its legendary editor Harold Ross. Smith joined the staff. His stint was short-lived, though, as he found little interest in editing the profiles assigned to him. Thurber briefly refers to Smith's tenure in *The Years With Ross* (1959): "Everything went wrong between Ross and Thorne, who once didn't show up for a week. When he finally did appear, Ross said, 'Why didn't you telephone and say you were sick?' Thorne had a lovely answer to that. 'The telephone was in the hall and there was a draft'."

Around this time, Ogden Nash, a young poet and editor at Doubleday, tracked Smith down at the house in Free Acres. Nash recalled: "I had been an ardent admirer of his since *Topper*... I

got hold of Thorne, we saw eye to eye about many things, and it didn't take too much persuasion to add him to the Doubleday list." Emboldened by the new contract and encouraging editor, Smith went into creative overdrive, writing three novels and a comedic play—all in less than a year.

The first novel to appear from his hand in 1931 was *Night Life of the Gods*, the madcap tale of scientist Hunter Hawk, who develops a petrifying ray used to turn people or animals into stone and back again. Hawk is the first Smith male protagonist actively in charge of his life rather than being merely reactive to some strange occurrence. Still, there's a touch of the supernatural in the form of Meg, a direct descendant of Megaera, one of the Three Furies in Greek mythology. Her skills involve bringing statues to life and vice versa. Together Hawk and Meg wreak humorous havoc on New York City, reviving the Metropolitan Museum of Art's statues of Olympian Gods and setting them



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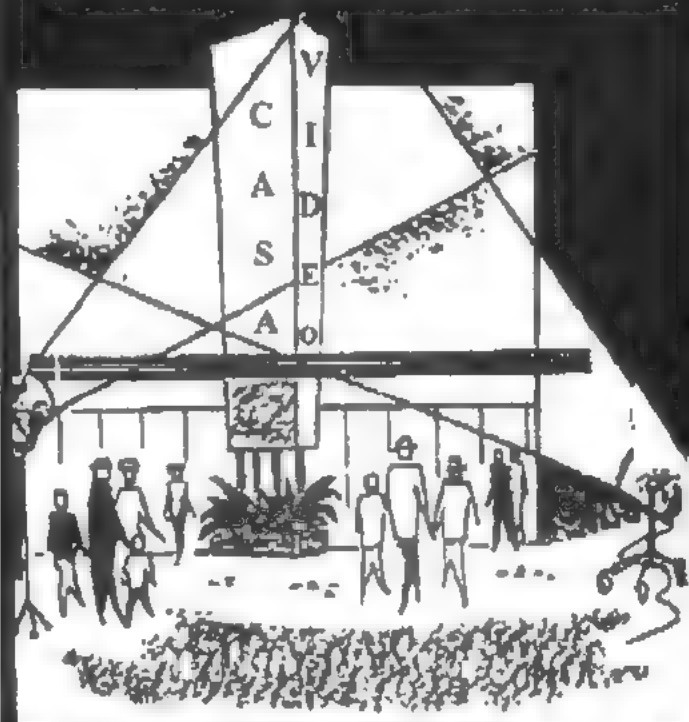
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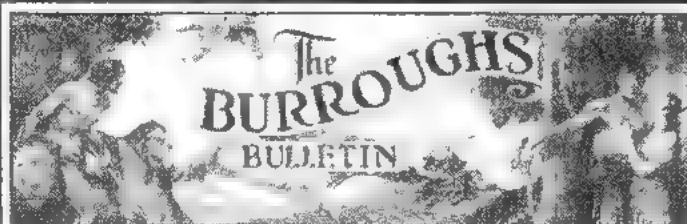
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free in the middle of Broadway. Amid the frolicking, Thorne's philosophy is carefully woven into discussions such as the one between Mercury and Betts (Hawk's butler), in which Betts declares "so-called sin, is the working capital of religion—all religion. It would sound very presumptuous, wouldn't it, to assure some god every morning and night in your prayers that you were every bit as good as he was? No. The whole system works on sin, and I haven't done enough of it." The novel concludes with Hawk and Meg returning the gods to the museum, having realized, "In a world that has forgotten how to play there was no room for the Olympians." Recognizing that there's no room for them, either, Hawk and Meg opt to turn themselves into a timeless sculpture of love. "As the current passed through the locked bodies a little sigh of ecstasy escaped the lips of Meg. The stone closed round them, shutting out the world. Nothing could get at them now. There was no time nor age. They had themselves forever, the man and the woman." A poignant finale to an otherwise amusing story.

A short time later, Smith turned in the manuscripts to *Turnabout* and *Lazy Bear Lane*, then sent Roland Young the comedic play he'd written specifically for him. (Young was to have portrayed a gentleman who inherits an estate that comes with three mistresses.) Sadly, the play was never produced and the manuscript has been lost.

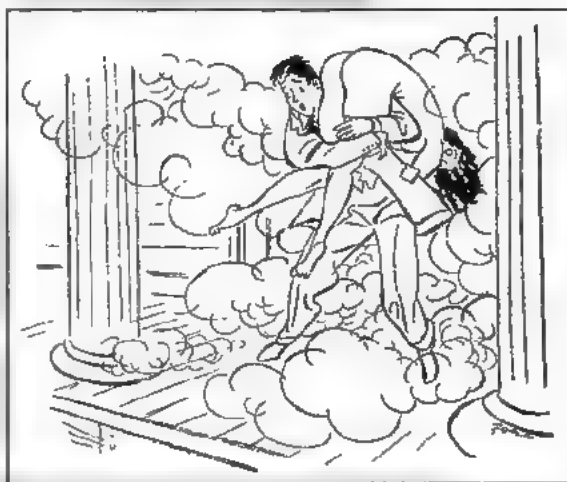
In June 1931, while waiting for *Turnabout* and *Lazy Bear Lane* to be released, Thorne received two bits of good news. First, Universal Pictures bought the film rights to *Night Life of the Gods* and took an option on *Topper*. Second, he received a letter from composer George Gershwin, requesting a meeting with him to discuss collaborating on a musical play. No notes have been found regarding the ideas the two discussed. One can only wonder what spectacular production those two talents might have created for the stage.

Doubleday published *Turnabout* in September. This zany offering concerns young marrieds Tim and Sally Willows, who switch places within each other's bodies. The story's inevitable sexual subtext was quite daring for the period. Sally's devilish pursuit of Carl Bentley (her extramarital lover) while residing in Tim's body is unforgettable. Smith makes the most of the homosexual scenario aboard a crowded train, simultaneously providing laughs aplenty while turning the tide on the opportunistic Bentley. *Turnabout* misses no trick detailing the difficulties the Willows undergo as the opposite sexes, especially when Tim learns he is pregnant! Prepare himself for giving birth, he queries several mothers, only to be tormented with their enthusiastic recitations of the dreaded and painful procedure. A hospital clerk delivers the memorable line, "If men had to have babies there wouldn't be any sex life left."

Turnabout was instantly popular, overshadowing the November release of *Lazy Bear Lane*, which sold poorly. This was a major disappointment for Smith, since it was a children's fantasy novel that had originally been a series of bedtime stories for his daughters. The recurring cycle of financial feast and famine continued to plague the Smith family as their expenses yet again exhausted the book income. Despite avoiding alcohol while he wrote his novels, Smith continually fell back to drinking during periods of inactivity and stress. His notorious largess also contributed to the erratic state of the family finances. According to *New York Times* writer Robert Van Gelder, "He was a one-man charity organization. At the slightest provocation he would

give away anything that he had. It is likely that a fair-sized parade could be organized any day in Manhattan of men clothed in suits, overcoats and even shirts which Thorne Smith gave them." Thorne and Celia both were actively involved in Free Acres community activities. They contributed time, money, and their skills to organizations within the colony and never forgot their friends. Upon his penniless return from a trip overseas, Harold Stearns called several friends for help, only to find many had forgotten him, or chose to avoid him once they learned of his financial plight. Thorne Smith, however, immediately had Stearns over for dinner, gave him a set of clothes, and paid for a week's stay at a nearby hotel. The Smiths neither asked for nor expected repayment.

Smith culled his notebooks for quick ideas to alleviate the financial strain. He rounded up his notes on the family visits to the French Riviera and used them to pen the sequel to his ever popular *Topper*. May 1932 brought *Topper Takes a Trip* to the public. This time, Cosmo Topper is on vacation in France when the Kerbys return to haunt not only him, but to tease and terrorize others as well. The effect isn't as



An illustration from *The Passionate Witch*...

clever the second time around, although there is still ample fun, with the highlight being Marion's inebriated effort to shoot the complacent Topper so he can join her in the afterlife. She misses the mark, wounding him in the derriere. George assures her that Topper can be made good as new, but she sobs, "I don't want him good as new. I want him all dead."

The novel concludes on an ambivalent note. Marion leaves without Topper, presumably forever, taking with her much of his hopes: "He did not tell himself in so many words that with the vanishing of Marion also vanished much of himself—that she had carried away with her the glamour and buoyancy of life, its mirthfulness and its romance. Inside him this knowledge was making itself poignantly felt." Topper then recalls Marion's promise that if she ever backslides on her spiritual journey, she will backslide to him, inspiring him to consider a late night visit to the French maid, Felice. Amusing on the surface, the finale leaves one unsatisfied and wishing Smith had consummated Topper and Marion's relationship earlier—perhaps taking us on further adventures with Topper as a ghost himself.

In June, the money situation improved when Doubleday secured the rights to Smith's previous novels and reissued *Did She Fall* and *The Stray Lamb*. A celebration party took place at the Free Acres estate. During the festivities, H. L. Mencken continued his habit of signing religious books by inscribing the Smiths' Book of Common Prayer with "compliments of the author." The book became something of a guest register, as Roland Young, Mae West, and others all took turns adding their entries. The joke may very well have triggered Thorne's next novel, *The Bishop's Jaegers*.

Appearing five months after the party, *The Bishop's Jaegers* chronicles the adventures of six people on a lost ferry boat that winds up at a nudist colony. While most of Smith's books feature a nude scene for comedic effect, *Jaegers* reverses the situation, with Bishop Waller as the lone clothed person among a community of nudists. One of the few Smith books to shun magic or supernaturally induced events, *Jaegers* is also the sole novel void of the trademark drunkenness. (This coincided with Thorne's improved control over his own drinking.) Sales were good and Smith found himself sought after by Hollywood. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer hired him to write dialogue. He moved the family

out to California, but soon—like many writers before and since—became frustrated with Tinseltown. He continued working on a novel he'd started prior to the move. In the spring of 1933, MGM released a short Smith had written called *MENU*. The amusing film featured Una Merkel as a housewife creating mayhem in the kitchen, while Franklin Pangborn played the husband suffering through her cooking. Smith also scripted a 17-page treatment and novel outline for a movie idea he'd dreamed up called *THE PASSIONATE WITCH*. He intended it for actor/radio comic Ed Wynn, whom the studio was having difficulty developing as a movie comedian.

Smith's next novel, *Rain in the Doorway*, was published in April 1933. The story follows the progress of Hector Owen, an estate lawyer who possessed "the type of face at which few persons ever troubled to look, and even when they did look they found no difficulty in pursuing the even tenor of their thoughts, assuming they had any to pursue." Waiting for his unfaithful wife, Lulu, in the doorway of a closed department store, Hector is suddenly snatched through the door and into another dimension by a mysterious hand. Here he explores a world run amok, where the hotels come with a willing woman to each room, customers are free to assault disinterested sales clerks, and lines of credit flow as easily as the alcohol. ("The only difference between this town and others is that here we make a virtue of what they make a vice.") Hector's love interest is not only the head of the Pornography Department, but carries a double entendre name, Honor Knightly, of the sort that would later be imitated in Ian Fleming's James Bond novels. *Rain* is a brilliantly original masterpiece of satire that rivals the best work of The Marx Brothers, whose 1941 film *THE BIG STORE* echoes much of the novel. In a classic case of "what might have been," Smith left MGM only shortly before the studio added The Marx Brothers to their roster.

How One Life Went Out

The return voyage to New York revived Smith's spirits. The normally shy, crowd-shunning spirit engaged in several shipboard shenanigans. He claimed victory in an hysterical race which required that the contestants, male only, race to the end of the deck carrying a full suitcase, open it, change into the women's clothing contained within, and run back to the other end of the deck.

Back in Manhattan, good luck continued to find Smith. Hollywood called again with offers to return to the movie mecca (wiser than many of his brethren scribes, he declined) and he set about writing a new novel he'd begun preliminary work on in California. That book, *Skin and Bones*, made its debut in December of 1933. The madcap story of Quintus Bland, a photographer whose experiments with X-ray film turn him into a living skeleton, *Skin and Bones* was a well crafted combination of humor and horror.

The plot starts off in typical Smith style, with the accent on the boredom of normal domesticity. Bland wonders why his wife "loved youth instead of life, why she wallowed in repetitive experience instead of questing fresh adventure." The repetition consists of a constant nettling, and Lorna's utterly bogus admiration for modern painting ("paintings which she neither understood, nor appreciated") in order to slight Bland's photographic work. Indeed, it is a fight over a painting ("As far as she could judge, it was a picture of a cow in convulsions") that sends Lorna

off with another man, leaving Bland to commence his skinless adventures.

When Bland seeks succor from a model, Lulu Summers, the strokes of her hand through his hair innocently reveal his skull and the real fun begins. (This may have been influenced by a film released earlier in the year, *MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM*, in which Fay Wray strikes Lionel Atwill's face only to have it crumble away to reveal his disfigurement.) None too surprisingly, mankind at large (apart from a friendly inebriate, who finds him less awful than seeing reptiles, and, ironically, his own wife) and Lulu in particular are somewhat less than delighted by the prospect of a living skeleton, or as Smith notes, "Although to become a skeleton is a noteworthy achievement it is not an admirable one." Similarities to *The Stray Lamb* also abound, notably near the conclusion when Bland is hunted by a mob whose voices "sounded cruel and ominous—a note of blind antagonism not only against himself in the form of a skeleton but also against the way he conducted his life as a man. These men were dead set against frank and open living openly arrived at. They feared such an existence and



... dramatized in *I MARRIED A WITCH*.

were prepared to stamp it out." In typical Thorne Smith fashion, though, all ends more or less well and the adventures serve to rekindle the romance of the Blands, or at least suggest that possibility. Released just prior to Christmas, *Skin and Bones* was dramatized for a Macy's radio program, with Smith even participating in an on-air interview.

Smith's earlier books continued to sell well enough to require reprints and allow him the comfort of enjoying his growing success, but the writer seemed happiest when working on one or more of the multitude of ideas his muse was supplying. He tried his hand at a short story titled "Yonder's Henry," which appeared in the

February 1934 issue of *Esquire*. He also started work on yet another new novel, called *The Glorious Pool*.

As was the Smiths' custom, they left New York for the summer, this time choosing Sarasota, Florida. Smith settled into a new daily routine of awakening early for breakfast, then writing until shortly before lunch. He'd swim in the Gulf of Mexico, catch a brief nap, eat lunch, and resume writing again. He sent the first half of *The Glorious Pool* to his publishers and completed a second short story, "Birth-day Present," which Redbook bought. His files contained a vampire manuscript he'd toyed with, the first chapter of a book about some people lost in a jungle, and a project titled *Der Kangaroos*. He was mentally working out the details of another serious novel, this one concerning a senior couple reflecting back on their lives. He signed a new 10-book contract with Doubleday and had never felt better in his life. The combination of financial success coupled with the freedom to write what he wanted had been hard won and he was just now beginning to enjoy it.

On the first day of summer, his favorite time of year, he woke up, ate his breakfast as usual, and went to work on the final chapters of *The Glorious Pool*. Shortly before lunch, he took his customary dip into the Gulf and then lay down for his short nap. Celia called him to lunch, but he didn't answer. She went to where he lay and tried to shake him from his sleep, but there was no response. At age 42, Thorne Smith quietly vanished from our world.

Night Thoughts on a Vanished Mistress

Like so much of his life, Thorne Smith's sudden death was a tragedy seasoned with irony. The uninhibited drinking that



The spectacular Eugene Pallette, who helped make *MY MAN GODFREY* (1936) and *THE LADY EVE* (1941) screwball comedy classics, also lent his impressive profile and gravelly voice to *TOPPER* (1937) as an understandably puzzled house detective. No wonder: George and Marion Kerby (Cary Grant and Constance Bennett) have checked in!

permeated much of his fiction to no ill effect had, in reality, significantly damaged his health and contributed to his heart failure. Smith's devoted love for Celia and his daughters prompted him to begin making payments for a \$30,000 life insurance policy. However, his self-imposed routine of concentrating on nothing else once he'd begun a new novel had led him to unknowingly let the policy lapse only a month before his death. H. Allen Smith remarked in *People Named Smith* (1950) that, while John Barrymore considered Thorne Smith to be the American equivalent of Jonathan Swift, Thorne "considered himself little more than a hack, and such popularity as he had during the closing years of his life didn't impress him. He had so little faith in the future earnings of his books that he neglected to write a will, with the usual consequence that his estate was in a snarl for years." When his wife and children most needed an income, there was none to be had.

Doubleday assigned Robert Hunt to work with Celia on finishing *The Glorious Pool*. Smith had always blocked out his novels with an outline and notes. This helped considerably, as did Celia's familiarity with Thorne's philosophy and writing style from her years of converting his cramped handwriting to typed manuscript.

The book's plot centers around a private swimming pool watched over by the statue of a naiad. Inexplicably the beautiful naiad comes to life, turning the pool into a modern fountain of youth. Rex Pebble and his mistress, Spray Summers (another name fit for a Bond girl), dive into the pool, restoring their aged bodies to the firm health of their mid-twenties. They proceed to set off on a wild escapade involving the hook and ladder unit of a fire truck. Some of the best dialogue takes place between two pyromaniac-minded neighbors after one has set the other's house on fire. "This is your house, Charlie, and I set fire to it. How am I ever going to make it up to you? Shall I set mine on

fire, Charlie?" "No," replied Charlie generously. "Don't do anything rash. Let me set it on fire for you." More madness ensues, including a hilarious hide-and-seek from the police in a darkened department store and a run-in with a neophyte gunman who "appeared to be mentally thumbing the index of a book of directions on how to commit a robbery." The major plot complication—and the book's major flaw—begins when Rex's wife, Sue, decides she wants to benefit from the magical water. With the introduction of Sue Pebble and her nephew, Kippie, the book veers from Smith's tightly constructed humor to the well intentioned but frantic paragraphs cobbled together by Hunt and Celia. Though she was unable to construct a seamless conclusion, Celia diligently labored over the manuscript to insure it maintained much of her husband's spirit. So true was she to Thorne's style that few readers until now have ever known that *The Glorious Pool* was completed posthumously by Celia Smith.

The same cannot be said for *The Passionate Witch* (1941). Norman Matson was assigned the formidable task of writing this novel based on the 17-page treatment Smith had created specifically for Ed Wynn. Matson consulted notes and an outline Celia had found in Thorne's effects, but completed the novel himself. Why Matson didn't collaborate with Celia to insure that the spirit of Thorne Smith inhabited the story is unclear. Later, Matson wrote a sequel called *Bats in the Belfry* (1943), which was not from Smith's notes but conceived by Matson alone.

Even a casual reading of *The Passionate Witch* reveals a novel containing elements of a Thorne Smith story (clever dialogue, sexual innuendo, and a middle-aged man whose life is altered by magic), but it's devoid of the lightheartedness and joy one expects. The material is so mishandled that it becomes obvious that Matson never understood his predecessor's philosophy of life. Smith's fondness for ani-

mals was quite apparent in his novels. He never had serious harm come to an animal nor would he have written such scenes. Yet Matson describes Jennifer (the witch) slashing a rooster's throat open, blood splashing about as she tries to fill a cup. Later, a family horse is killed when it falls on a crowbar that pierces its heart. Matson's malevolent Jennifer misses the mark as well. Smith created misguided or misdirected women, never intentionally cruel or evil ones. *The Passionate Witch* is best read as a book written in the tradition of, rather than a true novel by, Thorne Smith. Truth be told, the film inspired by the book, *I MARRIED A WITCH* (1942), is much closer to his original vision.

Locking the Gods Over

Thorne Smith's unique style bridged the gap between slapstick humor and the advent of screwball comedies. If he didn't create the screwball comedy, he certainly laid the foundation on which it was built. Shortly after his death, several of his books were turned into highly popular and influential movies.

I MARRIED A WITCH featured Veronica Lake as a playful witch determined to make the uptight Wallace Wooley (Fredric March) fall in love with her before he carries through on wedding plans with his snobby fiancée (Susan Hayward). Coincidentally, Robert Benchley, the long-time friend of Dorothy Parker and Thorne Smith, appears as Wooley's best friend, Dr. Dudley White. The film bears scant resemblance to *The Passionate Witch*, due to screenwriters Robert Pirosh, Marc Connelly, and Dalton Trumbo basing their script on the story Smith wrote while at MGM.

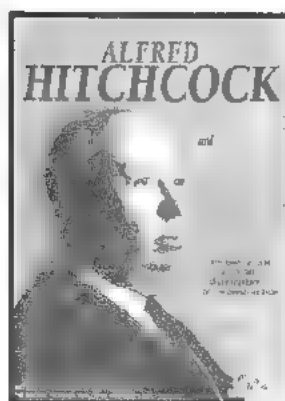
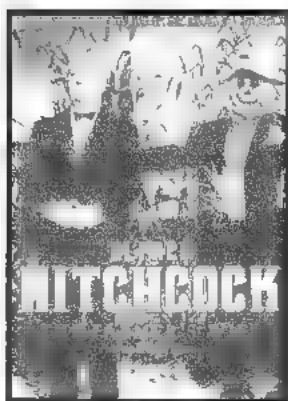
NIGHT LIFE OF THE GODS was actually the first film based on a Smith book. Released by Universal in 1935, it starred Alan Mowbray as Hunter Hawk, the scientist who discovers how to turn people into stone and bring statues back to life. Produced by Carl Laemmle Jr. and directed by

Lowell Sherman, who helmed the Mae West comedy *SHE DONE HIM WRONG*, this film has been unavailable for years. (The UCLA Film & Television Archive, however, have begun restoration work on it.) Initial reviews in *Variety* and other publications were fair at best, despite the fact that Sherman was an expert—both behind and in front of the camera—at sophisticated light comedy.

TOPPER is the film that everyone seems to know. It is also the film that many people still mistakenly believe was actually scripted by Smith—a neat trick that Thorne would have had to have been George Kerby to pull off! The Hal Roach Production was released by MGM in 1937 with Cary Grant and Constance Bennett as the jovial ghosts who haunt browbeaten banker Cosmo Topper (played by Roland Young). Billie Burke is perfect as Topper's domineeringly dizzy wife. This ageless classic truly captures the magic of Thorne Smith's vision on film. Smith's close friend Roland Young, who not only filed the role for all three Topper movies, but also handled the part during NBC's 1945 radio series *THE ADVENTURES OF TOPPER*, will forever be identified with the role, so perfectly did he portray the character. Originally the role was offered to W.C. Fields, which would have been interesting, but thankfully he turned it down. Young's brilliant performance in the first film earned him an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor. Cary Grant, seeking bigger and more lucrative roles, nearly turned down the role of George Kerby due to his newly acquired freedom from the old studio system. Look for Arthur Lake as the elevator boy, his last role before gaining fame as Dagwood Bumstead in the *BLONDIE* films. Hoagy Carmichael also puts in a brief appearance as Bill, the piano player. (Carmichael also wrote the tune "Old Man Moon," which is featured throughout the film.)

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Fly on the Wall **Kathleen Freeman**

interviewed by Chris Pustorino

One of the most recognizable faces in movies and television today belongs to veteran comedic actress Kathleen Freeman. Her remarkable career spans more than 50 years, with scores of feature films and countless TV shows and telefilms to her credit. Possessing an almost inherent flair for comedy—whether as a bewildered maid or housekeeper, or an ever-omnipotent adversary to Jerry Lewis or a pragmatic, sword-wielding nun—Kathleen has repeatedly proved to be an endearing figure to audiences worldwide. And, in doing so, she has ultimately become a legend in her own right—and quite deservedly so.

Recently, *Scarlet Street* had the distinct pleasure of talking with Kathleen about the many elements that have come to comprise her amazing career....

KATHY FREEMAN



Andre Delambre (Al [David] Hedgeson) staggers around in his laboratory while his maid (Kathleen Freeman), wife (Patricia Owens), and son (Charles Herbert) search frantically for THE FLY with the head of a man.

Scarlet Street: You've had an incredible career, encompassing a tremendous amount of work. We'd like to start by asking you about the TOPPER TV series.

Kathleen Freeman: Oh, sure! Great!

SS: How did you get the role of Katie, the Toppers' maid?

KF: Well, I simply went and read for it! (Laughs) There's nothing horribly glamorous about getting most of the jobs. The glamour comes after you get to do them—and do them well enough for everyone to remember them.

SS: Can you tell us a little about your experience on the show?

KF: It was an extraordinary experience, really, and for several reasons. First of all, the humor is filled with puns as well as being a play on somebody in trouble—which I think is a basic component of humor. Mr. Topper, of course, is privy to these two ghosts, but he's the only one who can see them, which ultimately places him in a dilemma. How else is he going to explain—constantly—these things floating and appearing and moving around to those who can't otherwise see the ghosts? I believe a man who's always in trouble for one reason or another is a great place to start a comedy problem. Nothing better, really. In this case, the fun comes with Mr. Topper trying to explain his way out of a situation by giving some sort of wonderfully childlike answer—yet, everybody still seems to buy his explanation. For instance, my character, Katie, might see a couple of martinis floating by and would say, "Mr. Topper! How do you do that?"—to which he

would answer, "Oh, they're just very light glasses!" Then, Katie would say, "Ah, I see," and simply go on about her business. Then, of course, this is followed by the two ghosts applauding him for his efforts and ability to stay out of trouble. Most people tend to salute and pull for the guy in trouble—and that's probably because most of us spend a lot of our time thinking we're in trouble, whether we are or not! (Laughs) TOPPER was a great show in that sense, and it obviously struck a chord with people because it's never stopped playing—somewhere—since it was made.

SS: Was it difficult or time-consuming to film the special effects shots required for the show?

KF: Yes, it was very tough. Although the technical work at that time was really extraordinary, there was still none of the technological expertise that's available today, so everything had to be done manually. For instance, floating glasses in front of a mirror usually required a couple of people high above with strings—or this special wire they used—and, of course, they had to make sure the wire didn't show. Making the ghosts invisible or semi-invisible all took a great deal of time, too. It was very exhausting, as a matter of fact. In those days, we used to work six days a week, from eight in the morning until eight at night—and a lot of it was because of the special effects. I remember, each season that I was on the show, we'd usually burn out about three sets of the best special-effects guys in town! They just couldn't do it anymore! I mean, doing two or three effects a day,

for six days a week—well, when are you supposed to have a chance to rest, or even pian for the next two or three effects? It all took quite a bit of time and was really exhausting.

SS: What memories do you have of Leo G. Carroll, who played Cosmo Topper?

KF: Mr. Carroll was a wonderful English gentleman! When we first met, I'd already been very much in awe of him—especially after having seen him in the role of the detective in *GASLIGHT* on stage. It was an awesome performance! He was a very, very fine actor, with a rather incredible range. If you look at his work over the years, you see that he could play anything from nasty, sneaky villains to befuddled, innocent characters. His range as an actor was really quite extensive. I stress the fact that he was an English gentleman because he was so precise and had a wonderfully dry sense of humor—which, of course, was perfect for Topper. At first, however, I didn't quite understand some of his humor and thought, "Oh, dear, I don't think he likes me." I'd shy away from him because I didn't want to offend him, especially since I thought he was so terrific. But, in time, I began to see these wonderful, dry things he would do, in the midst of all the raucous madness that was going on. For instance, there was always an enormous amount of pressure and people running around, and someone would yell out, "All right, Leo! Are you ready to go?"—and he would look right at them and quietly answer, "No." (Laughs) He was a very dear man and, besides my respect for him, I got to



know him quite well. In fact, I think I can say—and without contradiction—that we really quite adored each other. You know, if you “get” somebody—if you “get” who they are and they “get” who you are, you understand them and they understand you—then the possibility for friendship is wide open. Like Bob Sterling and Anne Jeffreys—I just adore them both.

SS: Well, as Lucy would have it, that was our next question.

KF: I think Bob Sterling was one of the best light comedians around. Just delightful—and he’s wonderful in that series! And, of course, Anne is unbelievable—she’s so beautiful! She is just extraordinary! I mean, my God, I look like her grandmother now! (Laughs) She’s still perking along—that darling little Southern lady. They were both really quite marvelous in the show.

SS: Do you stay in touch?

KF: Oh, yeah, although we don’t see each other much. You know, your life gets turned around and you’re going in 45 different directions. But when I do, it’s usually warm—with big hugs and “How are ya’s?” and all that.

SS: Another TOPPER cast member was Lee Patrick as Henrietta Topper.

“Preston Sturges used many of the same actors repeatedly. In one picture, a guy might be a train conductor—then, in the next picture, that same guy might have a leading role as a doctor. Jerry Lewis did the same. There was always a sense of that in those days, and I don’t think things have changed much. I mean, I haven’t had a chance to work for Mr. Scorsese, but I always say it’s because I’m blue-eyed and he does so many pictures about the Mafioso!”

KF: Now that’s another lady whom I admired for her work and her career prior to TOPPER, whose acting range and expertise went from sluts and hookers to the most elegant of women. She did the whole thing, you know? She had played the secretary in THE MALTESE FALCON, and she was wonderful playing this befuddled lady, Topper’s wife. Lee was very much in tune with the character and made her very believable to the audience, conveying this sort of tremendous naiveté. I adored her!

SS: You left the TOPPER after the second season? Why?

KF: Well, there was a new show in the works called, MAYOR OF THE TOWN, which was originally a big hit on radio and starred Lionel Barrymore and Agnes Moorehead. The TV show would also star one of the all-time greats in the business, Thomas Mitchell—who, of course, had done everything from performing to writing plays to directing. Well, I tried out and got the part Agnes Moorehead had played on radio—and, of course, Thomas Mitchell was in the role played by Barrymore. I loved doing TOPPER—and, yes, it was a difficult decision—but here was an opportunity to work with one of the greats and I just couldn’t ignore that. However, I wasn’t aware of it at the time, but Tom had apparently only signed to do the show for one year!

SS: Really? Was he more interested in working in feature films?

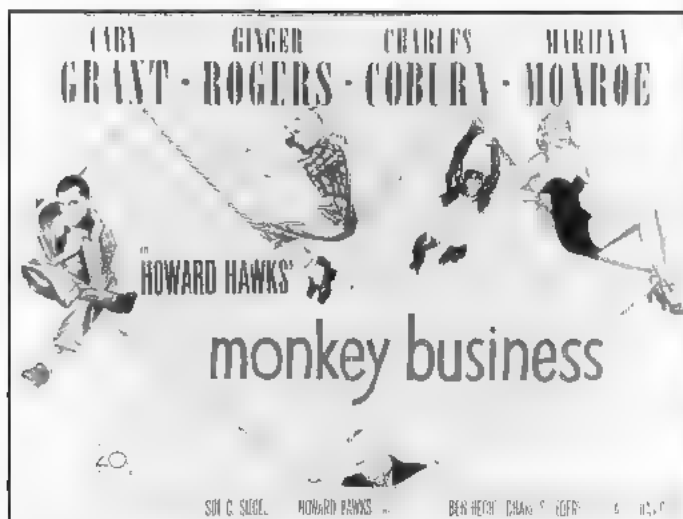
KF: Yes, I think so. It’s a tough schedule. He usually had an enormous amount of dialogue, and back then we did 39 shows a season. Six days a week of yackety yackety yack—all fresh material each time—can really be quite exhausting. Fortunately for Tom, he had what one might call a “photographic” mind. I mean, he could glance at material that was very complicated and almost immediately know his lines. Funny thing about that show, though—as far as I know, all copies of MAYOR OF THE TOWN have disappeared. It was shot on film at what’s now the Raleigh Studios. The sponsor was the Atlantic Richfield Company, so essentially it belongs to them and not the network. I’ve had people try to find it, but uness it’s somewhere in the Atlantic Richfield Company, it’s gone—which is a real shame because Tom was such a great actor. It’s happened to so much material over the years and it’s very sad, because so many wonderful performances have been lost—not to mention the fact that

I’d like to see myself in it! (Laughs) There’s no lying about that! That’s the only time in a show where I played the piano, doing a composition of my own! So, it would really be nice to see it again.

SS: Well, we’ll be happy to put the word out for you. How did you get your start in pictures?

KF: Well, there was a whole slew of people that included Bill Shallert, Marvin Kaplan, and myself, who belonged to different theater groups in town. In a sense, we were actually the people who started theater in Los Angeles, performing for The Circle Players, The Players Ring, and The Gallery Theater. We’d work all week, year round, doing full plays. There was





PREVIOUS PAGE: Kathleen Freeman has appeared in an impressive number of Jerry Lewis films over the years, including *THE DISORDERLY ORDERLY* (1964), her personal favorite. **LEFT:** Kathleen was the next-door neighbor minding a baby mistaken by Ginger Rogers for her husband—Cary Grant! It all made sense of a sort in Howard Hawk's *MONKEY BUSINESS* (1952). **RIGHT:** Phoebe Dinsmore (Kathleen Freeman) tries to teach Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen) to say "cahn't" instead of "caaan't," while director Roscoe Dexter (Douglas Fowley) explains that "the microphone is in the bush" in Hollywood's greatest musical: *SINGIN' IN THE RAIN* (1952).

no Sunday-to-Thursday stuff. Our intentions were to be a theater company, and we actually were one. We had some incredible mentors coming to see our productions. In addition, the casting people, who all belonged to the studio system and who would go around the nation looking at collegiate and theater work in a search for new talent, would also come to our theaters—constantly. Well, a lovely lady by the name of Millie Gussy, who was one of the heads of talent for Universal Pictures, came and saw me in a play—and, subsequently, hired me to do my one and only line in *THE NAKED CITY*. And, of course, I was excited out of my skull!

SS: Wasn't *THE NAKED CITY* the first film to be shot entirely on location in New York?

KF: Well, no. Although most of it was filmed in New York, I actually did my scenes on the sound stages at Universal.

SS: You appeared as Babe in 1949's *MR. BELVEDERE GOES TO COLLEGE* with Clifton Webb. Was Webb as acerbic off the screen as he was on?

KF: Oh, sure! Of course! But, not in the sense of killing you off or anything like that. More like—impatient with the "lesser mortals" and that kind of thing which is very different. This man was a legend in his own time, too. He'd been a great dancer in musical theater in New York and he was even an international star in dancing circles—he played London as well. He was the stuff! (Laughs) God knows, as an actor his delivery was fabulous! Great timing! He grabbed ahold of me at one point and said, "When it's a long shot, do just like you would do it in the theater. When it's a medium shot, cut that down in half, and when it's a close-up, don't do anything—just think!" Well, I'll tell you, that's the kind of advice that lasts your entire life—and it happens to be absolutely true today, just as it was 50 years ago. That's brilliant! And, of course, now my ego pops out, but I really think he said that to me because he thought I

had something.

SS: You've worked with some notable directors over the years. For instance, you were directed by Howard Hawks for his 1952 picture, *MONKEY BUSINESS*.

KF: Mr. Hawks was really kind of—brilliant. He did something that was common to great directors—and may still be—and that is, if you cast something well, with people whose expertise is malleable, you're going to end up with something really good. If you support an actor in what they do, it gives them a great sense of solidarity and freedom and allows them to bring whatever they have to the project. Frank Tashlin was another one. There wasn't a whole hell of a lot to talk about if you were going in the right direction. If you knew the leader was sitting there in support, it's like anything where you try to do well for somebody you respect and admire. Once that comfortable rapport develops between an actor and a director, it often creates a kind of stock company. For instance, Preston Sturges used many of the same actors repeatedly. In one picture, a guy might be a train conductor—then, in the next picture, that same guy might have a leading role as a doctor. Jerry Lewis did the same thing. There was always a great sense of that in those days, and I don't think things have changed much. They may have. I mean, I haven't had a chance to work for Mr. Scorsese, but I always say it's because I'm blue-eyed and he does so many pictures about the Mafioso! (Laughs) They forget there were a lot of Irish immigrants at the same time!

SS: How about George Stevens, who directed 1951's *A PLACE IN THE SUN*?

KF: Oh, yes! Now, see, he was another one who, as long as things were going well, would just watch. He looked very much like a college professor; always a pipe in his mouth. Here again, it was a big solidarity kind of thing. He was also quite wonderful in that he would sneak shots on people. In other words, he'd shoot the

rehearsal—and sometimes it turned out better than the final shots! He'd make like three movies, then cut them down to one, which was common for him; he always had a tremendous amount of material. In fact, it was funny for me. I played Shelley Winters' girlfriend at the factory and every day when I'd come in, he'd add more lines here and there for me. Well, I was in seventh heaven! But, when I finally went to see the movie—I was left with one line! (Laughs) I had no idea that this was just his mode of doing a film.

SS: You played vocal coach Phoebe Dinsmore for Stanley Donen on his 1952 hit, *SINGIN' IN THE RAIN*.

KF: Pretty great stuff! He and Mr. Keily were very much partnered in what they were doing. I might sound egomaniacal when I say this, but I honestly don't remember getting a tremendous amount of direction for most of my career. I try to be the character I'm playing by the time I get there. Of course, if it's going wrong, I'll take anything you tell me. But, generally, I've had direction that's been that way—which I is wonderful because it means I wasn't so far off the mark. I hope I don't sound like I'm tooting my own horn.

SS: Not at all. In fact, it says a lot about your capabilities as an actress.

KF: Well, for instance, if you hire—say, Lee Marvin—you immediately have a sense of his essence. You're not going to have him play a weak, indecisive librarian! It's not in the mix! Not that he couldn't—but outside that certain amount of power of every actor's range lies a core—a big core—and you want to take advantage of that inner essence.

SS: What do you recall about Vincente Minnelli while working on *THE BAD AND THE BEAUTIFUL*?

KF: He was really quite remarkable. An other quiet director. He certainly turned out some fascinating and fabulous work. He had a great visual sense, which is in

Continued on page 73



"**W**hy should anyone want to kill Miss Carrington?" wonders Cosmo Topper (Roland Young). "Well, they killed me, didn't they?" the ghost of murdered Gail Richards (Joan Blondell) reminds him. "Yes, well, I can understand that," the much put-upon Topper reasonably decides in his third, last, and best cinematic outing, *TOPPER RETURNS* (1941), a work that rates high marks in nearly every capacity and should be on everyone's list of all-time great "old dark house" comedy mysteries. The film is a nearly perfect amalgam of direction, writing, acting, cinematography, and scoring that falls short only in a somewhat extended shipboard slapstick sequence (which looks more like a bit from a Hal Roach two-reeler than it should) and a mystery so transparent (yet workable) that *Variety* identified the culprit in the second paragraph of their review! Those minor quibbles to one side, *TOPPER RETURNS* is a lightning-paced 87 minutes in which the straight lines are scarcer than credible suspects and the results are probably the closest the movies ever came to capturing the manic intensity of Thorne Smith's comic sense. The irony: it's the Thorne Smith film that wasn't adapted from a Smith novel.

Overall, transferring Thorne Smith to the screen was not the easiest task imaginable. While the center of nearly all Smith's work was a battlecry against conformity in any and every form (not an idea designed to warm the cockles of the Breen Office), the writer almost invariably chose to address this issue by undressing as many of his characters as possible, thumbing his nose at most matters "moral," espousing the view that sex—sanctioned or illicit—was both normal and enjoyable, and questioning the value of any liquid that boasted less than a 40 percent alcohol content. Thus just ain't the stuff of post-Code movies. The first such effort,

Universal's *NIGHT LIFE OF THE GODS* (a comedy the tone for which was set by billing it as "from the novel by the late Thorne Smith, directed by the late Lowell Sherman"—something just guaranteed to put the viewer in the mood for high comedy!) has long been unavailable, but was not a world-beater in 1935. It wasn't until Hal Roach had a sanitized version of *TOPPER* translated to the screen in 1937 that Smith's work received serious film attention. *TOPPER* wasn't really Smith's novel brought to the screen, but it retained the novel's ghostly premise and its whimsy, even while reducing the ribaldry to a perhaps too genteel level. Naturally, since Norman McLeod's film was a success—thanks largely to the casting of Roland Young as Topper, Billie Burke as Mrs. Topper, Constance Bennett as Marion Kerby, and especially Cary Grant as George Kerby—the studio opted for a followup by adapting Smith's own sequel novel, *TOPPER TAKES A TRIP* (1938). It was a lesser book and produced a lesser film, but still a reasonably popular one. After that, there weren't any more Topper books to adapt . . .

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in the shuffle, but was even somewhat subverted. Poor Cosmo has here settled into middle-age and doesn't regain his nonconformist vitality despite this latest bout with the supernatural. However, the character of Gail Richards is wholly Smith inspired—a snappy, take charge, hard drinking gal (and equally thirsty ghost) whom Thorne would have taken home to mother in a heartbeat. And doubtless Smith would have more than approved of such Code questionable moments as when Topper unknowingly crawls into bed with Gail's ghost, only to be greeted by, "Get your cold feet off my back! You don't need all the covers, do you?"

Placing the film in an old dark house setting and throwing in a mystery angle was an inspiration born out of commercial consideration and the success of *THE CAT AND THE CANARY* (1939), *THE GHOST BREAKERS* (1940), and, to a lesser extent, *THE GORILLA* (1939) and *YOU'LL FIND OUT* (1940). A few thrills—or at least shudders—were then proving quite successful in bolstering comedians, so the same approach was a natural to apply to the already supernatural, but non-thrill oriented, Topper films. The switch here—and it's one that remains fresh 60 years on—is that the supernatural agency isn't the source of the chills. This gives *TOPPER RETURNS* just the right novelty edge to set itself apart from its brethren in humorous mayhem.

The mystery thriller element isn't the only difference between *TOPPER RETURNS* and its direct parents. The entire tone is much more frenetic, requiring a director other than Norman McLeod, who had made the earlier films. McLeod could be a very good director, indeed, even though he seems to have been curiously cursed throughout his career. He made what would have been the two most concentrated Marx Brothers films of all time, *MONKEY BUSINESS* (1931) and *HORSE FEATHERS* (1932)—had not Leo McCarey come along to make *DUCK SOUP* (1933) and steal his thunder. The McLeod helmed *IT'S A GIFT* (1934) may well be W. C. Fields' best film, but in terms of recognition it was popularly eclipsed by Eddie Cline's

(1933), for instance—had a similar drive to them, and his handling of the original version of *THE MALTESE FALCON* (1931) proved him more than capable of a style suited to mystery. Del Ruth's *BULLDOG DRUMMOND STRIKES BACK* (1934) is surely one of the most stylish comedy thrillers of all time. (If his first talkie, 1928's *THE TERROR*, were not lost, we might find he was even more suited to mock-horror material than we know! Indeed, the cleverly atmospheric titles with a shadowy "hooded killer" evoke something of what we do know about *THE TERROR*.) Whatever the case, Del Ruth gets *TOPPER RETURNS* moving and keeps it going—with occasional time out for some genuinely effective atmosphere (aided by one of the most spectacular of all Old Dark House settings, complete with a magnificent grotto leading to the sea) and at least one sequence—when Gail's ghost rises from her corpse, opens her bedroom window, and walks off into the clouds—that is as beautiful and effective as anything in Jean Cocteau's *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* (1946).

It bears noting that Del Ruth and his writers were more than a little blessed in the matter of casting. It was expected that Roland Young and Billie Burke would return as the Toppers, and both deliver the goods, especially Billie Burke in possibly the finest—certainly the most brilliantly outlandish—performance of her career. Replacing Constance Bennett



Topper Returns

by Ken Hanke

THE BANK DICK

(1940) McLeod directed one of the best Bob Hope films with *THE PALE FACE* (1948), but Frank Tashlin made *SON OF PALE FACE* (1952) and caused the original to look almost weak! Much the same happens here—Roy Del Ruth's *TOPPER RETURNS* finds the McLeod originals somehow wanting.

Del Ruth was the perfect choice for the film. His early thirties Warner Bros. pictures—*BUREAU OF MISSING PERSONS* (1933) and *THE LITTLE GIANT*

in the shuffle, but was even somewhat subverted. Poor Cosmo has here settled into middle-age and doesn't regain his nonconformist vitality despite this latest bout with the supernatural. However, the character of Gail Richards is wholly Smith inspired—a snappy, take charge, hard drinking gal (and equally thirsty ghost) whom Thorne would have taken home to mother in a heartbeat. And doubtless Smith would have more than approved of such Code questionable moments as when Topper unknowingly crawls into bed with Gail's ghost, only to be greeted by, "Get your cold feet off my back! You don't need all the covers, do you?"

Placing the film in an old dark house setting and throwing in a mystery angle was an inspiration born out of commercial consideration and the success of *THE CAT AND THE CANARY* (1939), *THE GHOST BREAKERS* (1940), and, to a lesser extent, *THE GORILLA* (1939) and *YOU'LL FIND OUT* (1940). A few thrills—or at least shudders—were then proving quite successful in bolstering comedians, so the same approach was a natural to apply to the already supernatural, but non-thrill oriented, Topper films. The switch here—and it's one that remains fresh 60 years on—is that the supernatural agency isn't the source of the chills. This gives *TOPPER RETURNS* just the right novelty edge to set itself apart from its brethren in humorous mayhem.

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Topper Returns

by Ken Hanke



LEFT: *TOPPER* (1937) established the blackly comic tradition of fatal car crashes in Thorne Smith film adaptations, first with George and Marion Kerby losing their lives, then with Cosmo Topper (Roland Young) losing his—though the Kerbys persuade him to return to the land of the living. **RIGHT:** The second film, *TOPPER TAKES A TRIP* (1938), only featured a car crash in a flashback, but *TOPPER RETURNS* (1941) more than made up for it with no less than three. Pictured are Ann Carrington (Carole Landis), Dennis O'Keefe (Bob the cabbie), and Gail Richards (Joan Blondell) shortly after crash number one.

with the brassier Joan Blondell (in one of her last appearances as a leading lady, before her already evident matronliness moved her into character roles) steps up the pace and removes some of the genteel nature of *TOPPER RETURNS* predecessors. This, however, does have the effect of removing Topper himself from the role of tempted husband and making him more of a hapless victim. Blondell was still sexy in a somewhat obvious fashion, but there's never a hint that Topper is even slightly smitten with her as he had been with Bennett's Marion Kerby.

The addition of Eddie "Rochester" Anderson is a masterstroke. Movies of the era veritably teemed with black comic servants. Some of these performers were capable of brilliance. Mantan Moreland, Louise Beavers, Hattie McDaniel, and (given the right material) Willie Best come readily to mind. Rochester (billed only as "Chauffeur" and referred to throughout the film as Eddie, suggesting that he's really playing his established Jack Benny character, is something quite apart: a performer who is never tainted with the spectre of racism occasionally marring even the best work of his contemporaries. (This is perhaps due to his almost more than equal pairing with Benny.) Even

when handed standard shtick about "feeling pale" there is no hint of racism, because Rochester remains stubbornly and irresistibly Rochester. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in his encounters with an argumentative seal that simply will not let him climb out of the drink, constantly pushing him back into the water. It's not hard to imagine the scene with Moreland in Rochester's place, in which case it's equally easy to envision the changes—Moreland reacting in terror to the animal (probably mistaking it for something a bit more daunting). Rochester, on the other hand, is surprised by the beast's presence, but takes its existence and its troublesome nature in his stride. He knows the seal is going to be bad news ("Uh oh!"), but isn't frightened of it, and sets out to tackle it as such: merely commenting that the constant dunkings are "getting awful monotonous" (a word Moreland would have mangled). All in all, Rochester is fresher and more modern than his contemporaries. He may be playing a chauffeur, but he comes across much more in the manner of Whoopi Goldberg than Mantan Moreland.

The rest of the cast is rounded out nicely by Carole Landis as heiress-in danger Ann Carrington, and while she

LEFT: Another tradition is the dead, fallen log that Smithian apparitions seem to enjoy sitting upon. Here, in *TOPPER TAKES A TRIP*, Marion Kerby (Constance Bennett) and Mr. Atlas (Skippy, who also played Asta in the *Thin Man* series and George in 1938's *BRINGING UP BABY*) contemplate their lost mortality. **RIGHT:** The final moments of *TOPPER RETURNS* return the audience to the famous log, where Topper chauffeur Eddie (Eddie "Rochester" Anderson) meets murder victim Gail Richards and her killer, Mr. Carrington (H. B. Warner).



isn't given more to do than look attractive and menacing, neither is she annoying or obtrusive. Dennis O'Keefe—just on the threshold of minor stardom—is an asset as Bob, the cab driver who comes to collect a fare and stays to protect Ann. His role is surprisingly well written and conceived, even if he does spend the climax like any decent genre hero: unconscious on the floor. His wisecracking exchanges with Donald MacBride's blustering police detective Sergeant Roberts are genuinely funny, written in much the same vein as the snappy dialogue screenwriter Latimer evidenced in his Bill Crane novels. The menaces—genuine and of the red-herring variety—are given over to H. B. Warner as Ann's estranged father; Trevor Bardette as the sinister butler, Rama; Rafaela Ottiano as the Mrs. Danvers-like (at one point MacBride even refers to her as Rebecca) housekeeper Lillian; and the wonderful George Zucco as a dubious medico, Dr. Jervis, who specializes in looking both suspicious and lecherous, often in the same shot. (Zucco's eyes are all over the place, whether he's warning Mr. Carrington that he's said too much or offering snap diagnoses of Topper's mental state.) The only cast member with cause for complaint is Patsy Kelly as Emily, Mrs. Topper's personal maid. The role primarily calls for her to exude bemused resignation in the face of her mistress's unbridled dithering, but, seasoned trouper that she was, Kelly still makes something of a role that required little more than a straight man.

TOPPER RETURNS wastes no time getting started. Ann Carrington and her friend, Gail Richards, have returned from China to meet Ann's father and claim her inheritance. (Apart from setting up one of the film's most bizarre—yet in context wholly reasonable—turns of phrase, there's no good reason for them to have been in China though they had to be somewhere.) Obviously, someone is less enthused by this homecoming than is Ann, since a sniper blows out the tire on the taxi in which they're riding, nearly plunging our heroines to the rocky coast below, and leaving them stranded while their driver, Bob, goes for help. Rather than wait, the pair decide to hitchhike the rest of the way. The normal approach fails and the **IT HAPPENED ONE**

NIGHT skirt-hike works too well (sending their would-be ride halfway up a tree), so they opt for the direct approach—planting themselves squarely in the middle of the road to wait for the next victim, who naturally turns out to be none other than Cosmo Topper. "Uh oh! Danger ahead—two of 'em," opines Topper's chauffeur, Eddie. Our heroines don't so much ask for a ride as they simply commandeer the car (Gail, in fact, commandeers Topper's lap) and direct it to the Carrington Estate—a prospect that does not please Eddie ("If there wasn't anybody living there, it'd be a haunted house!") Topper is himself less than ecstatic for quite a different reason—the road to the Carrington Estate passes right by his own house, where Mrs. Topper (complaining that a coat she isn't wearing doesn't keep her warm!) is dutifully awaiting her husband. "Oh, look, there's someone waving to us!" cries Ann. "It's a lady," notes Gail, waving back cheerfully. "It's worse than that, boss, it's Mrs. Topper," Eddie informs his increasingly glum boss, who

lamely pulls his hat over his face with the air of a man who knows full well that the situation isn't going to be easily explained.

Making the best of an impossibly bad situation, Topper and Eddie deposit their unwanted charges at the gloomy old mansion and beat a hasty retreat. No sooner have Ann and Gail met Ann's father and settled into the house than Ann is again very nearly killed by a falling chandelier—a spectacular event that is, of course, brushed off as an accident (Someone badly needs to clue the girl in on the fact that heiresses on the eve of their 21st birthdays are invariably a nuisance to someone.) Of course, we mystery veterans know better, just as we know that Gail will be given the strangest quarters in the house, a room done up entirely in Oriental esoterica. (One suspects that Latimer and Douglas had seen **YOU'LL FIND OUT** before structuring their script, so marked are certain similarities—the falling chandelier, the 21st birthday business, the comic lead being given a singularly uninviting room . . .) "Well, this is just



If there's one thing Thorne Smith enjoyed, it was a drink—and his ectoplasmic creations took after him in a big way. In **TOPPER RETURNS**, Gail momentarily foregoes her distress over being a stiff one in order to have a stiff one.

course, merely a momentary affair, but one that lends an aura of legitimacy rare in comic thrillers.

Soon—and for no very good reason, except that it's essential to the plot—Gail's ghost makes her way to the Topper household, only to discover the banker paying for his earlier "indiscretion." "I didn't pursue them, Clara! They forced themselves on me," explains Topper. "Don't be absurd! Imagine girls—pretty girls—forcing themselves on a paunchy, middle aged man," argues Mrs. Topper with more accuracy than tact. "I don't think I'm paunchy," counters Cosmo, only to be accused of changing the subject. Distracted by Gail's invisible movements and still nursing his bruised ego, Topper manages to drive his wife from the room before finding himself sharing a bed with the spectral Gail, who has climbed in to keep warm. When Gail materializes ("Here I am, Toppy! Remember me? The girl that sat on your lap?"), Topper is far from pleased. "Oh, but this is terrible! You're a ghost! You're dead!" he bleats.



TOP: Rama the Butler (Trevor Bardette) didn't do it, but after he meets Mrs. Topper (Billie Burke) who'd blame him if he did? Best known as Glinda the Good Witch of the North in *THE WIZARD OF OZ* (1939), Burke had perhaps her funniest role as Cosmo Topper's ditzzy wife, who became ditzzy with each succeeding picture in the series. The Topper servants (Eddie "Rochester" Anderson and Patsy Kelly) can do little more than stand by stoically. **ABOVE:** Midway through *TOPPER RETURNS*, most of the cast finds itself locked in an icebox. That's Donald MacBride in the coat and hat, underplaying as Sergeant Roberts. **PAGE 55:** A beautifully atmospheric shot of victim and killer on the roof of the Carrington mansion.

"No kidding?" she asks, genuinely perplexed, but seemingly not much bothered by the idea. "You better get out of here," Topper advises. "I've had enough trouble with your kind of people" (clearly recalling his adventures with George and Marion Kerby). It's no good, though, since Gail threatens to reveal herself to Mrs. Topper if he doesn't help her solve her own murder (a clever and unusual concept), and Topper knows all too well where that may lead. (*TOPPER TAKES A TRIP* starts out in a divorce court.) As a result, Topper finds himself and an equally reluctant Eddie ("Okay, I'll go with you, but kinda keep to one side, 'cause I've got a feeling some running's gonna be done!") bound for the Carrington Estate to play sleuth.

Eddie's misgivings rapidly multiply once they arrive at their destination, especially when he finds a set of footprints appearing "magically" next to his own in the sand. "Pardon me, boss, but could I get confidential for a moment?" he asks, further inquiring, "Do I look as pale as I

feel?" "What's the matter with you?" Topper (who ought to know better) wonders. "I don't know, but there's somebody here I can't account for!" Eddie responds. The subsequent sight of the invisible Gail taking Topper's arm is enough for Eddie, who deserts the pair in favor of a fast drive home.

It doesn't take long for Topper and Gail to discover her corpse. "This is positively horrible! You've been stabbed!" he tells her. The news so disquiets the lady that she quickly commences drinking. "This is no time for champagne," objects Topper, only to be told, "Oh, but, Toppo, it isn't every day a girl gets murdered"—a statement of impeccable logic. Unfortunately, Topper's efforts to call the cops are interrupted by members of the Carrington household, led by Carrington's dubious doctor, Jervis, who quickly sizes up the unwilling gumshoe. ("Just as I thought—schizophrenia!") Naturally, while all this is going on, the murderer removes the body, making Topper look every inch the nutcase the doctor diagnosed, a situation not helped in the least when a note supposedly penned by Gail conveniently appears to explain matters. Topper's subsequent statement that he last saw Gail "sitting on a table in the hall and she hung my hat on a Chinaman's foot," true though it is, scarcely puts him in a saner light.

Leaving Topper temporarily, we find Mrs. Topper (in a plastic sleeping mask that makes her look like Katherine Helmond in *BRAZIL*) aroused by the far from silent return of Eddie. "What in the world is wrong with you?" she demands of the chauffeur. "It ain't me, it's them things!" explains Eddie. "Doors closing by themselves, people talking to nothing and getting answers! I'm going back—to Mr. Benny! Ain't nothing like this ever happened to him!" Unfortunately, his resolve is as nothing in the face of the demands of his bewildering and invincible mistress, who makes him take her and her bemused maid, Emily, to the Carrington Estate. Mrs. Topper isn't so much a character as she is a force of nature—and not one to trifle with as she prepares to descend on the creepy homestead.

Things have been happening at the Estate in the interim—an incipient romance has sprang up between Bob and Ann, and another attempt has been made on her life by the black-cloaked figure. This time, however, the killer's been seen by Bob, whose down to earth nature makes him a more solid witness than Topper.

Bob is a refreshing change from the average movie hero of the era, acting more like a Lee Tracy reporter than a cab driver charmed by a pretty face. After chasing the villain from the scene, Bob encounters a visibly distraught Lillian trying to revive Ann. "What's going on here? Who's that guy in the black coat? What happened to her? Who are you?" he asks in rapid succession. "I'm the housekeeper!" she snaps. "Fine way to keep house—women screaming, boogie men jumping out of windows! If I had a house like this, I wouldn't wanna keep it!" When the rest of the menage arrive, Bob (in a bit borrowed from *THE CAT AND THE CANARY*) turns to Dr. Jervis and remarks, "I'll bet you the first thing she says when she opens her eyes is 'Where am I?'" (Instead, she disappoints him by asking, "What happened?") The break in his authority prompts Jervis to question Bob's presence. "Alright, so I'll explain it to you," Bob volunteers, punctuating his story with the aid of the would-be assassin's knife. "This young lady owes me for a taxi cab ride. I came here to collect it, she asked me up to this room, I heard her scream, and walked into the middle of an Orson Welles broadcast!" This makes Carrington reconsider Topper's presumed loss of sanity. ("Perhaps Topper's story was right. He said they'd murdered the other girl. Now they're trying to murder Ann!")

Satisfied that Ann no longer needs protection, Topper is about to desert Gail when he finds Mrs. Topper on the scene. Even the sinister butler, Rama, is no match for her! When he insists that she must be mistaken about her husband being there, Mrs. Topper replies, "I am not mistaken! I

know I'm not. I'm Mrs. Topper, aren't I, Edward?" The others have no better luck with the woman, especially since her principle concern is the thought of Gail perched on Topper's lap. Carrington, responding to a question about her husband's whereabouts, suggests, "I think you'll find him in the sitting room." "Maybe she's still sitting on his lap," says Emily. "Good heavens! You mean you've got a room just for that?" asks Mrs. Topper, as she commands the house, sending Eddie to search for her wayward spouse, despite his strong objections to the dark. ("Don't be silly. There's no difference between light and dark, except the lights are out.")

Eddie's explorations lead him through a secret passage—inexplicably inhabited by a raven—and a watery cavern beneath the house (into which he plummets when he falls down a hole). Meanwhile Mrs. Topper phones the police to report her missing spouse and inadvertently reports the murder at the same time. ("Oh, yes, there's something else. Now let me see, I paid the milkman, that luncheon's been changed from Thursday to Friday . . . oh, yes, there's been a murder. A murder. Capital m-u-r-d-e-r! Trying to make these policeman understand something is harder than doing it yourself!") It's no wonder that, rather than face this human typhoon of twisted reason, Cosmo opts to hide in the mansion's walk-in icebox. Likewise, it is less than surprising when she finds him there and makes some kind of sense out of it! "You never used to sit in our icebox," she sniffs in a tone that suggests this is some kind of ultimate betrayal of fidelity, adding, "Getting out of a nice warm bed to come sit in someone's icebox."

Into this setup comes Donald MacBride's bustering Sergeant Roberts. In essence, it's the same role MacBride had been playing night on to forever and which he would

continue to play throughout his career—but like everything else in *TOPPER RETURNS*, it is carried to new and delightful extremes. Like Mrs. Topper, he doesn't enter, he barges onto the scene, announcing that he's been told there's a murder and immediately accusing Rama of culpability. Poor Roberts: he quickly learns that the body has disappeared, the only witness to its existence has disappeared and the note that explains it all has disappeared. (We've seen Lillian trying to burn it, only to be thwarted by the invisible Gail.) "The note's gone, Topper's gone, the body's gone! Now, look here, I don't have to come here to be made a fool of!" Roberts announces (to the complete agreement of Bob), then he proceeds to further demonstrate his prowess.

Roberts. Now, look here, Rebecca, where is this guy

Topper? Quit stalling

Lillian. I don't know.

Roberts. What was he doing here in the first place?

Dr. Jervis. I don't know

Roberts. Say, whaddya think I am?

Bob. I don't know

Roberts. Who is this fresh guy?

Ann. Oh, he's alright, he's a taxi driver

Roberts. Yeah? Well, where's your taxi? Now, don't tell me that's disappeared too.

Bob. Where do you think it is?

Roberts. I'm not supposed to think! I'm from the City Hall! Now, where was I?

Bob. I don't know

Roberts is a character just begging to run afoul of Mrs. Topper—which he soon does, also meeting Topper himself

Continued on page 75



Rear Window

The Music of Sound

by Ross Carr

The creative use of sound in both theater and motion pictures is one of the least documented aspects of both arts. But when sound design is combined with an innovative use of music, when music is sometimes actually used as sound, the two components can fuse into one of the most potent and evocatively atmospheric elements in either medium.

While Alfred Hitchcock was a virtuoso of visual/dramatic innovation, the recently restored REAR WINDOW (1954) proves his mastery of total sound synthesis as well. A study of the music/sound design of this classic reveals a brilliant evocation of the naturalistic through the most calculated of means. A further perusal of the film's original music cue sheet also reveals just how carefully the music/sound tapestry that is the complete REAR WINDOW soundtrack was woven by Hitchcock, composer Franz Waxman, and (no doubt) the combined forces of the Paramount music and sound departments. (It's also exemplary of techniques employed in the commercial exploitation of studio-controlled film music and songs during this final era of Golden Age Hollywood.)

REAR WINDOW was the last of Waxman's four collaborations with Hitchcock (commencing with REBECCA in 1940) and it was not a conventional fifties Hollywood assignment in any sense of the word. Aside from a somewhat isolated "Main Title" and a few source cues, Waxman's work on REAR WINDOW consists of one major theme that is heard in over 15 variations throughout the film, all (except for a few of the final cues) scored for solo piano (Waxman's piano theme is also known as "Lisa," after the Grace Kelly character.)

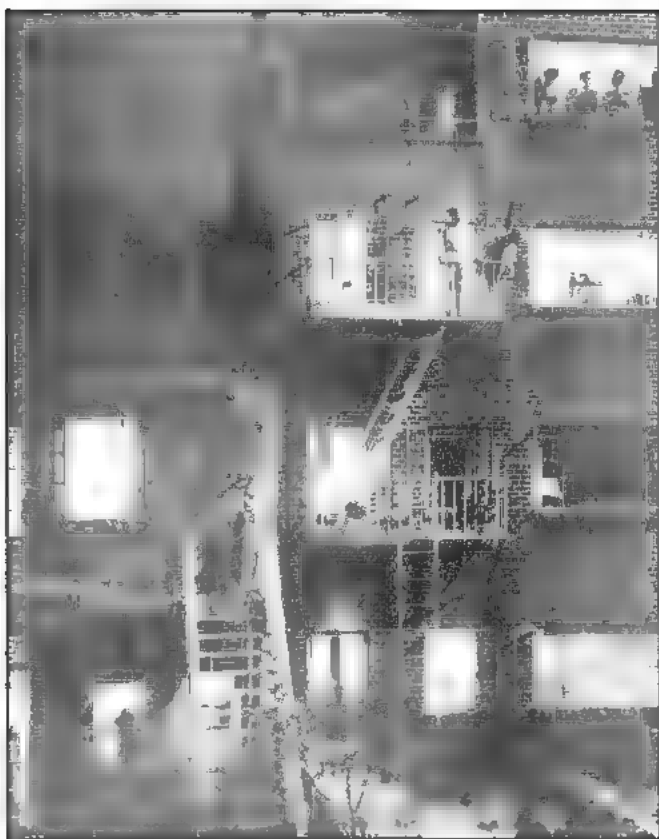
The "Main Title" is the only real "score" cue in the film. The rest of the music makes up an interwoven collage of source music, which though sometimes ambiguously assuming the function of traditional underscoring, in actuality only emanates from various on- or offscreen sources—radios, juke boxes, an apartment piano—within the physical

setting of the plot itself. Waxman's theme provides the score's overall unity, recurring rondo-like throughout the film, while other cues range from classical snippets through a variety of popular songs, most of the latter (not surprisingly) drawn from the Paramount song library.

Often, as with NORTH BY NORTHWEST's use of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's "It's A Most Unusual Day" under the scene in which Cary Grant is abducted from the Plaza Hotel, the choice of songs was also apparently dictated by their duality as witty musical double entendres and "in" jokes—i.e., "Lady Killer" (from 1954's RED GARTERS) played under the scene in which police lieutenant Tom Doyle (Wendell Corey) assures L. B. Jefferies (James Stewart) that Lars Thorwald (Raymond Burr) could not possibly have murdered his wife!

The film opens with Waxman's "Main Title," a bustling, modernistic "Street Scene" style scherzo, vividly orchestral but jazz tinged. Given the source-based function of music in the rest of the film, it's surprising that Hitchcock opted for a standard "Main Title" at all, though Waxman's work is, as always, anything but standard or conventional. The credit music also serves as a transition into the opening scenes, the orchestral strains gradually growing more distant (and reverbified, an electronic echo effect) as the camera trucks out of a picture window to investigate the morning activities of the rear court of the large Greenwich Village apartment complex that serves as the film's sole setting.

With the camera's lift-off, the orchestral scoring gradually becomes more distant and fragmented. Music is often used to mark a transition into fantasy in films. But here it is uniquely utilized for just the reverse effect, a transition into reality as the "artificial" strains of the "Main Title," literally music "out of nowhere," fade under the source (or "real") music that will be used exclusively for the rest of the film. There are, as Stella (Thelma Ritter) says in the film, "four syllable words" for all this—diegetic, nondiegetic, anempathetic—but never mind . . .



The "Main Title" fades under a radio announcer's voice—"Men, are you over 40?"—which in turn cuts to instrumental dance music as one of the tenants—the composer, abruptly changes stations. This "Rhumba," Waxman's second original cue in the film, continues under the truck through the courtyard and back through the window, providing the first installment of a mass of on going visual information about the various tenants and their life styles, and moving to an extreme closeup of the sweating face of L. B. "Jeff" Jefferies, a roving photojournalist with a broken leg, who is now confined to a wheelchair in his small apartment in the midst of a heat wave. Music and the persistently snooping camera both come to rest on a closeup of one of Jeff's photos on the cover of a *Lifelike* magazine.

Fancy Free?

Cue #3 introduces the first of an eclectic assortment of non-Waxman tracks, in this case an excerpt from Leonard Bernstein's 1943 ballet "Fancy Free." Given Jeff's physical and psychological situation, as well as his defensive attitude towards marriage, "Fancy Free" is the first of several cues which must have been at least partially chosen for the ironic significance of their titles. This (and all ensuing) ballet music emanates from the apartment of a dancer, Miss Torso (Georgine Darcy). As the camera further peruses the complex, a fragment of Waxman's main theme is heard from the apartment of a composer/pianist (Ross Bagdasarian) who will also be heard throughout the film struggling with various metamorphoses of the effusive tune on his studio grand. ("Fancy Free" was also the ballet that was eventually expanded into the musical *ON THE TOWN*.)

The Bernstein cue features extensive solo piano, and so the shift to the composer's first full pianistic rendition of Waxman's lyrical main theme ("Lisa") is almost imperceptible. It sneaks in under the dialogue scene between Jeff and his pragmatic visiting nurse, Stella, and underscores their discussion of Jeff's intimidating relationship with the practically perfect and very sophisticated Lisa Fremont (the perfectly cast Grace Kelly)

LEFT. L. B. Jefferies' *REAR WINDOW* neighbors react to the death of a pet dog—all except Lars Thorwald, that is, who's responsible for killing the animal. The pet owners are played by Sara Berner and Frank Cady.

The first of a string of selections from the Paramount hit parade, a Harry Warren tune from the 1953 Martin and Lewis flick, *THE CADDY*, is next heard under the conclusion of the Jeff/Stella scene. "That's Amore" functions dually as a kind of ethnic barrel organ tune, and as another droll musical comment on the on-going marriage motif, as Jeff observes the first appearance of the newlywed couple (Rand Harper and Havis Davenport) who will become a sardonic running gag for the rest of the film. (A cynically ambivalent view of "amore" and marriage is by now an off and running subtext of *REAR WINDOW*. Most of the opening dialogue deals with pressuring the "fancy free" hero into marriage.)

As the newlyweds draw their shade, there is a transition to the next scene, the apartments under the hellish glow of a hot red-orange evening sky (The *mise en scene* here reminds us that Paramount also produced 1951's *WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE!*) The first appearance of Lisa, seen in tight closeup as her shadow almost ominously bears down on the sleeping Jeff, introduces an intimately shot scene which gradually establishes that he is the most eager of all to get the much put-upon photographer to tie the knot.

As their conversation gradually takes on an antagonistic edge, the first major musical set piece unfolds, synched to a Bing Crosby vocal from the soundtrack of the Crosby/ Hope/Lamour pic, *ROAD TO BALI* (1953). The orchestra introduction initially takes on the ambiance of traditional romantic underscoring, but the song soon proves to be more source music, possibly from the apartment radio of a single older woman, Miss Lonelyhearts (Judith Evelyn, best known to horror fans as the deaf-mute murder victim of 1959's *THE TINGLER*). Again, the title and lyrics—"To See You Is To Love You"—provide an ironic poignancy to the touching scene in which Miss Lonelyhearts entertains an imaginary romantic guest she can neither see nor love. As Jeff and Lisa observe the scene, the earnest instrumental conclusion of the track also lends a genuinely sympathetic resonance to Lisa's increasingly difficult situation with the man she loves, who also is "not quite there" ("To See You" was written by James Van Heusen and Johnny Burke, who scored most of the Road pictures.)

"To See You" leads into

the (unscored) first scene

between Lars Thorwald

and his shrewish wife,

Anna (Irene Winston),

observed by Jeff in long

shot and through separate

picture windows,

with the bickering

couple literally divided

by a brick

wall! The Thor-

wald's scene ends

as a reprise of Wax-

man's romantic pi-

ano theme commen-

ces to underscore a

brief confrontational

scene between the

gamely persevering

Lisa and the almost

brutally resisting Jeff

After Lisa exits, the

solitary Jeff hears a

scream that sug-

gests something





LEFT: Lars Thorwald (Raymond Burr, staunch upholder of the law as Perry Mason) wipes his wife's blood from the walls. **RIGHT:** Alfred Hitchcock and the producer who first brought him to Hollywood, David O. Selznick. Such was their volatile relationship that Hitchcock had Burr made up to resemble Selznick for the role of the wife-killer in *REAR WINDOW* (1954).

violent has (perhaps) occurred somewhere within the apartment complex

In a series of nocturnal scenes, only one of which is scored by more street music—Rodgers and Hart's "Lover" (from Paramount's 1932 *LOVE ME TONIGHT*)—Jeff observes the suspicious comings and goings of Mr. Thorwald. Morning dawns to more music from Miss Torso—cue sheet #10, "New Ballet," thus composed by Waxman in a sort of forties New York jazz-dance mode. (The next ballet cue, #19, will be strictly classical: Schubert's "Rosamunde.") During these scenes, two more running music/sound motifs are also established, the wordless soprano solo of a female singer vocalizing somewhere in the complex, (this first heard behind the previous sunset scene) and classical selections from an anonymous offscreen whistler.

Waxman's piano theme returns at regular intervals, sometimes providing an ironically lush background to mundane scenes of quotidian apartment life, and sometimes as counterpoint to the attraction/revulsion business between Jeff and Lisa. The next major musical episodes appear mid-film. The whistler's "Ah, So Pure" (from von Flotow's *MARTHA*) introduces a Waxman interpolation entitled "Juke Box #3" (listed as #21 on the Paramount cue sheet). This track is "Many Dreams Ago," a romantic ballad (with words by Mack David) derived from Waxman's lyrical love theme for 1954's *ELEPHANT WALK*. A party in the composer's apartment occasions even more Paramount tunes, a vocal rendition of Livingston and Evan's hit "Mona Lisa" (from 1950's *CAPTAIN CAREY U.S.A.*) sung by the guests (including Marla English and Kathryn Grant), followed by a piano version of the team's aforementioned "Lady Killer."

Rear Window/Red Garters

In the eclectic *REAR WINDOW* score, Paramount was obviously pushing both Jay Livingston and Ray Evans, the studio's most successful songwriting team, and the score for their musical, *RED GARTERS*, released the same year as Hitch's film. On the heels of "Lady Killer" comes "Bad News," heard in a brassy big-band arrangement under the scene in which the body of a pet dog is discovered in the courtyard. Even the Western spoof's title tune is soon instrumentally heard as "Juke Box #6A."

Obviously, aside from their ironic (and cross-promotional) significance, the fact that Paramount did not have to pay extra royalties for the use of these studio-owned tunes was another factor in their inclusion in the *REAR WINDOW* soundtrack. (All the major studios did this; listen to Warner Bros. cartoon scores and the source music in *NORTH BY NORTHWEST*.) Livingston and Evans, who had written such hits as "To Each His Own" and "Buttons And Bows" for Paramount during the forties and fifties, would also provide a surprise hit for Hitchcock and Doris Day with "Que Sera Sera" for 1956's *THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH*, the rather insipid ditty also copping an Oscar for "Best Song," the third for the team. (The record itself was Day's sixth-million seller.)

Waxman's recurring *REAR WINDOW* theme was also developed as a song entitled "Lisa," with lyrics by Broadway tunesmith Harold Rome (*WISH YOU WERE HERE*, *FANNY*, *DESTINY RIDES AGAIN*). Aside from its functional use within the dramatic context of the film, the ongoing "Lisa" reprises firmly implant the melody in the consciousness of the audience, suggesting that Hitchcock and/or Paramount were not unaware of the promotional/financial potential of a hit movie theme during this era. The craze for pop movie themes/title tunes had been launched only two years earlier with Tiomkin's *HIGH NOON*, a million seller which peaked at #5 and remained on the best-seller charts for 19 weeks in 1952.

The last cues in *REAR WINDOW*, which culminate in a vocal version of the theme melody, belong to Waxman. Prior to the incongruous Western jazz of the *RED GARTERS* title track, we hear Waxman's "Juke Box #6," a jazz opus combining spacey fifties cool vibes with an early forties Gramercy Five chamber jazz sound. This nervously rippling *agitato* plays under the scene which concludes with Lisa slipping the accusatory note under Thorwald's door.

The concluding music cues brings the "Lisa" song to its final fruition. The composer is seen (and heard) rehearsing the tune with a small group of instrumentalists in his apartment (#34, "Rehearsal Jam Session"), thus providing a backdrop to the scene in which Lisa and Stella dig up Thorwald's garden and Lisa daringly ventures into his empty apartment. The music covers her discovery by Thorwald,

and her last minute rescue by the police. From then on (aside from a few more piano improvs), the remainder of the film—including its climax, Thorwald's assault on Jeff in his apartment (clever, but not necessarily one of Hitchcock's most chilling set-pieces)—is played sans music.

In a brief post-denouement coda, the composer is seen playing a new record of his by now familiar melody to Miss Lonelyhearts and we finally hear the song in an orchestrated vocal version. Even so, the lyrics are so garbled and the voice so obscured under a layer of sound effects—no wonder Harold Rome is not even mentioned in the credits—that we can barely understand any of the words until the male vocalist reaches his and the music's climax on "Lisa!" (Hitchcock concludes the film with another ironic marriage dig that would not have been out of place on ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS.) A brief "End Title" provides a final musical stinger in a sprightly Hitchcockian mode, suggesting that all has been in good, if slightly naughty, fun—provided one can overlook the film's scathing critique of marriage.

Whether an intelligible vocal of "Lisa" with Rome's lyrics was ever commercially recorded is open to question. As countless vocals of Hollywood title tunes were released during this era—I once found an MGM 78 rpm single of the theme from *PANDORA AND THE FLYING DUTCHMAN* (1951) sung by Billy Eckstine!—there may be one still floating about somewhere out there in vinyl heaven. Instrumentals of the *REAR WINDOW* theme were recorded several times in the fifties, on movie mood music LPs by Victor Young on Decca and Leroy Holmes on MGM Records (*LUSH THEMES FROM MOTION PICTURES/MGM E3172*). Recently, it appeared as a brief track on one of the Silva Screen Hitchcock CD anthologies.

Throughout the film, nonmusical sounds—natural effects of rain and thunder, city noises such as crowds, traffic, sirens, and distant tugboats—are also applied to create an almost subliminal, but highly atmospheric sheath of ambient urban sound. (It's too bad that the film was not originally recorded in stereo, because these effects would have been even more effective in stereo-surround.) *REAR WINDOW* restorationist Robert Harris offered these comments on the original soundtrack recording and restoration process. "The audio tracks, while mono in their entire origination, have a tremendous depth to them. Hitchcock recorded much of the information from the set of Jimmy's apartment with audio fed from a distance. One of our problems was that all of the mixed mag [magnetic] material, three stripe, etc., were all junked in 1967. The only element we had to work with were used 35mm prints, all of which had been produced using a single defective track negative."

Another unusual aspect of the music in *REAR WINDOW* is how it is not used—i.e., musical cues are seldom applied (as they often were during this period) to cover fades and transitions. The frequent use of silent transitions, such as in the early sequence of terse nocturnal scenes, is especially representative of how distinctive these silent fade ins and outs can be, allowing the audience to savor Hitchcock's expressive manipulation of tempo, editing, and tension unadorned. If *REAR WINDOW* did not win an Oscar for best use of sound, it certainly deserved one.

Trivia fans may be interested to know that the role of the composer/pianist is played by a real musician—or an ultimately highly successful one, anyway. A few years after his appearance in *REAR WINDOW*, actor/songwriter Ross Bagdasarian was the creative force behind several million-selling singles. In 1958, Bagdasarian penned and (under the WASPish name of David Seville) recorded "(I Told The) Witch Doctor." This immortal classic was soon followed by an even more enduring novelty success—"The Chipmunk Song" (aka "Christmas Don't Be Late.") Unbelievably, the latter, recorded à la the tape-manipulated mouse voices in

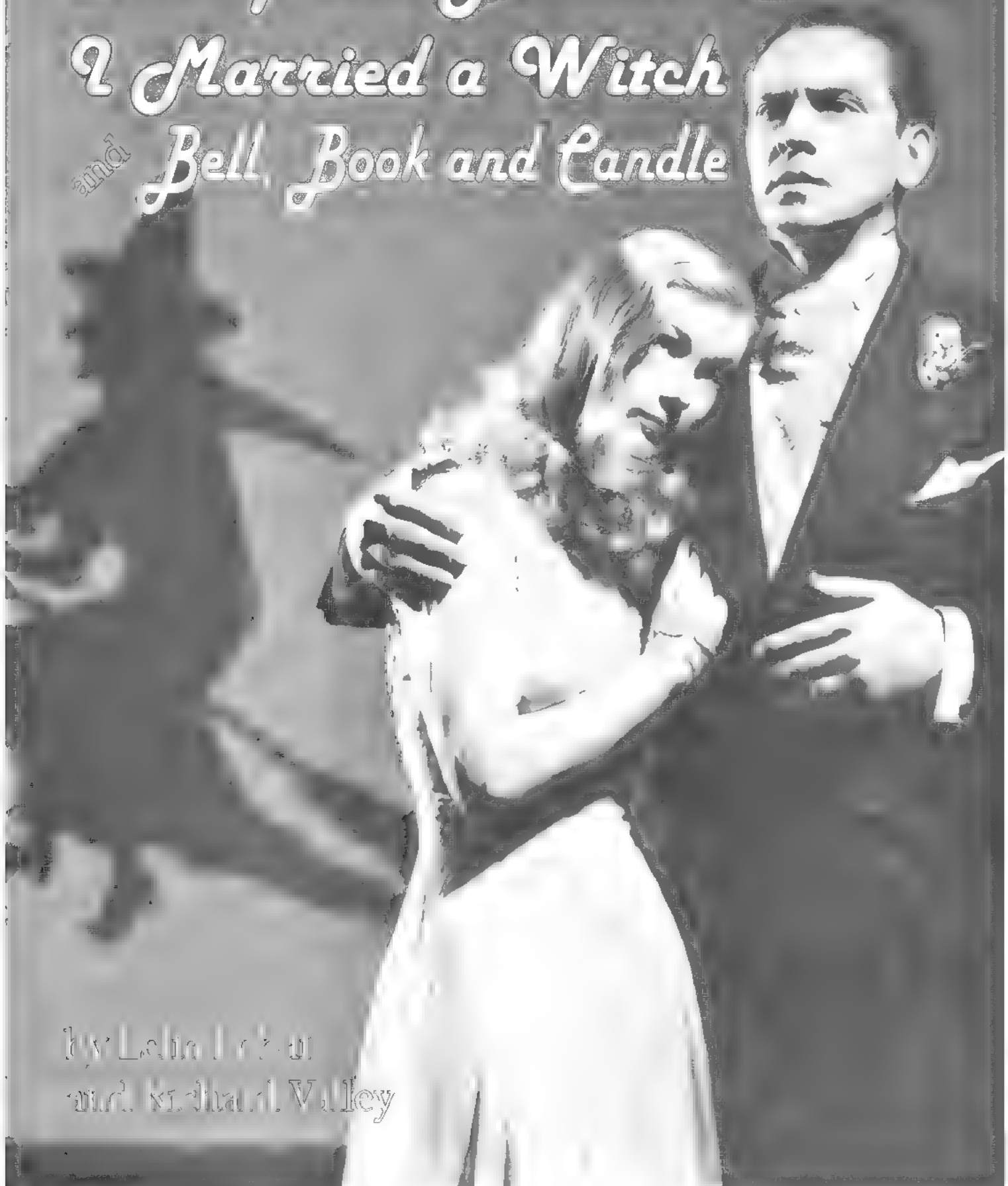
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TOP: It's no night at the opera, but Stella (Thelma Ritter), Lisa (Grace Kelly), and Jeff (James Stewart) all acquire a musical education while peeking through the *REAR WINDOW*. **CENTER:** A *REAR WINDOW* highlight is Bing Crosby's warm rendition of "To See You," lifted from the soundtrack of 1952's *ROAD TO BALL*. (Crosby is pictured in a cut musical number with Dorothy Lamour and Bob Hope.) **BOTTOM:** Doris Day hit million-seller gold singing "Que Sera Sera" in Alfred Hitchcock's *THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH* (1956).

Out of the Broom Closet
I Married a Witch
and Bell, Book and Candle

by Lelia F. Felt
and Richard Valley



"Honestly, it's amazing the way people don't—they just don't believe there are such things. I sit in the subway sometimes, on buses, or at the movies, and I look at the people next to me and I think, 'What would you say if I told you I was a witch?' And I know they'd never believe it, they just wouldn't believe it!"

—Elsa Lanchester as Queenie

Q **MARRIED A WITCH** (1942) and **BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE** (1958) leave most of their critics with an impression of harmless fun: clever dialogue, deft acting, stylish sets and costumes, crisp direction, but slight substance. With several decades of hindsight, it's time to invite these witches out of the broom closet. What kind of movies are these, anyway?

Though both deal with witchcraft and spirits, these comedies aren't horror movies, obviously. Humor undercuts every potentially creepy, frightening, or gruesome moment. They're not anti-horror movies that ridicule the genre, either, even though they use stereotypical items, such as the broomstick, to comic effect. The witches are sympathetic, three-dimensional characters. They can make their enemies look foolish, but the witches themselves are no fools.

Both **I MARRIED A WITCH** and **BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE** are social satires—written, acted, and directed with a light touch, it's true, but social satires nonetheless. The witches stand for outsiders in a society in which some upstanding citizens would like to "out" them, in order to convert them or (metaphorically or literally!) burn them. Both movies mirror the Hollywood of the blacklist era, the forties and fifties. By the time **I MARRIED A WITCH** came out in 1942, the term "witch hunt" had already become a widely-used metaphor for overzealous political and social crusades.

Rene Clair produced and directed the charming **I MARRIED A WITCH**, made by Paramount but sold to United Artists before its release. Clair had already written, produced, and directed some highly-regarded films in France, including several sophisticated comedies, before migrating to England and helming the whimsical **THE GHOST GOES WEST** (1935). Hollywood was Clair's next stop. Paramount head Buddy DeSylva assigned Preston Sturges, the studio's resident comic genius (1940's **THE GREAT MCGINTY**, 1941's **THE LADY EVE**), to act as supervising producer for **WITCH** (a film version of the 1941 Thorne Smith/Norman Matson novel *The Passionate Witch*). Though he was already deeply enmeshed in writing his own next comedy (1942's **THE PALM BEACH STORY**), Sturges was happy to accept the assignment because of his desire to work with and further the Hollywood career of Clair, a director he much admired and to whom he was often compared. Robert Pirosh (1937's **A DAY AT THE RACES**) and Marc Connelly (1936's **THE GREEN PAS-**

TURES, based on his play) were assigned to write the screenplay. Clair, an "auteur" director, worked closely with Pirosh and Connelly. They significantly altered the plot, the characters, and the tone of the source novel (Norman Matson had completed *The Passionate Witch* from a 17-page outline found after Thorne Smith's death, and later wrote a sequel, published in 1943 as *Bats in the Belfry*.) Midway through preproduction, Sturges, who couldn't help but rewrite the pages submitted to him by Pirosh and Connelly, graciously withdrew from the project.

I MARRIED A WITCH opens in 17th-century New England, as Puritans burn the heroine, Jennifer (Veronica Lake), and her 80,000-year-old father, Daniel (Cecil Kellaway), neither of whom—for purposes of the plot—are yet seen. (In real life, the New England Puritans never burned anybody. Authorities in Salem hanged 19 people and pressed a man to death beneath a board with stones piled on top of it.) The potential horror of burning at the stake (see, for example, 1961's **BLACK SUNDAY**) is immediately offset by having a vendor offering refreshments as if everyone were attending a baseball game. ("Popped maize! Get your fresh Indian popped maize! Tuppence a poke! It's hot! It's fresh! An anti-witch charm in every poke!")

Unlike the actual persecuted victims in Salem, though, Daniel and Jennifer are as guilty as hell! However, most of their activities sound more prankish or libertine than evil. Father and daughter have been turning their neighbors' cows blue and fornicating and that sort of thing. The witch hunters think it's appropriate to burn people to death for such hanky-panky.

Instead of forcing the witches to repent, this harshness radicalizes and incites the supernatural outsiders. As the fire roars, Jonathan Wooley (Fredric March), who denounced the witches, tells his mother (Eily Malyon) that his lover, Jennifer, has paid him back for turning her in, by cursing him so that, "I, and all my descendants, will be unhappy in love. The marriages we make will be disastrous. Until..." He stops short of repeating Jennifer's condition, but, given the movie's title, the audience can guess. The Puritans plant a young oak tree over the witches' ashes, so that the grow-

ing roots will bind the spirits under the earth.

Fredric March, whose previous forays into horror and fantasy had won him an Oscar for his dual role in **DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE** (1931) and included the character of Prince Sirki in **DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY** (1934), plays not only Jonathan Wooley but all his hapless descendants. There's something ironic about Fredric March playing a witch hunter, because, a few years before he made this movie, Texas congressman Martin Dies' Special Committee on Un-American Activities had denounced March as the contemporary equivalent of a witch. The Dies Committee,



Bohemian Greenwich Village witch Gillian Holroyd (Kim Novak) confers with Pyewacket, her "familiar," in **BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE** (1958).



along with state Senator Jack Tenney's California Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, was a forerunner of the United States House Committee on Un-American Activities. The HCUA, better known by the somewhat incorrect abbreviation of HUAC (impudently pronounced "Hew-wack"), commenced investigating Hollywood Comics in 1947, before sinking to the true depth of its infamy in the fifties, under the leadership of Chairman Joseph ("Tailgunner Joe") McCarthy.

In 1937, "The deposed Secretary-Treasurer of a Longshoreman's Union made the accusation that Fredric March was involved in a Communist plot to dominate the United States" (Michael Burrows, *Charles Laughton and Fredric March*, St. Austell: Primestyle, 1969). Called before the Dies Committee, March vehemently denied the accusation. The Dies Committee concluded, in 1938, that March had "contributed to and permitted use of his name by organizations" led by Communists (Burrows).

The harassment continued. March was accused of being a pro-Communist, along with 17 other Hollywood figures, by John L. Leech, and responded angrily by calling Leech "an unmitigated liar." In 1948, March and his wife, Florence Eldredge, sued *Counter-Attack*, a publication that had labeled both of them Communists. They received substantial damages. (March, though no Communist, did like a bit of magic in his life, by the way. He shortened his name from Frederick to Fredric because he considered 12 his lucky number.)

Another contributor to *I MARRIED A WITCH* showed compassion toward another kind of outsider, years later. One of the Hollywood informers to the HUAC, Richard Collins, told Victor S. Navasky in an interview, "A month or

two after I testified, I went to a Writers Guild meeting . . . I knew almost every writer in the guild, and there were only three who said hello to me. Bob Pirosh, whom I didn't know well . . ." (*Naming Names*, New York: Viking, 1980)

In *I MARRIED A WITCH*, the Wooley men suffer the curse down through the generations. Each Wooley marries a virago. In modern times, the latest victim, Wallace Wooley, is running for Governor and engaged to a woman who, supplied with casters, would be accurately referred to as a bitch on wheels. This is Estelle Masterson, played to icy perfection by Susan Hayward before she reached full-fledged stardom. Completely co.hearted but ever mindful of appearances, Estelle flashes her scary fake smile on cue, as if she were flicking a light switch. True to her name, she plans to master that son of a Wooley. Her father, chain newspaper tycoon J. B. Masterson (Robert Warwick), wants to prod Wooley into the Governor's office, then pull his puppet strings.

Wooley seems, at worst, a bit woolly-minded and passive, reconciled to his fate, if not exactly ecstatic as the well-groomed groom-to-be. He doesn't deserve to get stuck with these *film noir* creeps. The witches look good by comparison (March's occasional pomposity as an actor, which mars some of his dramatic work, suits Wooley to a T.)

Meanwhile, lightning strikes that old oak tree. Escaping in the form of smoke, the witches drift through the storm toward the party lights and—at the sight of Estelle browbeating her intended—congratulate themselves that Jennifer's curse still works. But because, "True suffering comes to the man in love with a woman he cannot marry," she and her father cast a spell to set the Puritan Hotel on fire, so that she can come back to corporeal life through

the same means that killed her. Seeing his young daughter off with a parody of conventional fatherly advice, the sorcerer tells her fondly, "Be a bad girl," as he drops her on the burning rooftop and zooms away on a broomstick.

Wooley, on his way home with Estelle and his friend and chief political contributor, the tippling Dr. Dudley White (Robert Benchley), gets caught in a traffic jam caused by the fire. All Estelle can do is complain about the inconvenience. Even the hotel owner (Emory Parnell) sounds cynical, planning a much nicer building that he'll construct with the insurance money.

In contrast, Wooley selflessly rushes into the burning building and saves Jennifer, or so he thinks (since, of course she staged this charade). The audience at last sees Veronica Lake, complete with trademark peekaboo bang but presumably without clothes. (Wooley offers his coat, but Jennifer finds a better one in another room.) Jennifer is surprised to find herself a blonde, which makes it clear that both she and her father (when he at last takes human form) look nothing like their earlier 17th-century incarnations. Although Wooley thinks they're hopelessly trapped in the burning building, Jennifer casually shows him the way out and he emerges with the scantily-clad enchantress in his arms. Now the candidate is a hero, Dr. Dudley gloats—but Estelle quickly sizes Jennifer up as a potential rival.

Wooley deposits Jennifer at a hospital with Dudley, but she follows Wooley home on a broomstick, won't let him toss her out, and spends the night in his bed—much to his chagrin and the outraged proprieties of longtime housekeeper Margaret (Elizabeth Patterson, fairly fresh from wishing Paulette Goddard would drop dead in 1939's *THE CAT AND THE CANARY*). In a series of madcap scenes, Jennifer demolishes his carefully planned life, with help from her father, who emerges rather smokily from Wooley's fireplace. Veteran South African character actor Cecil Kellaway, who played everything from gangsters to dinosaur dinner in his long career of more than 100 movies, steals his every scene as Daniel, who is dangerous when he's sober—but isn't sober much, since his favorite out-of-body hiding place is in a bottle of booze. (Kellaway endeared himself to genre fans as a magician in 1940's *THE MUMMY'S HAND*, a leprechaun in 1948's *THE LUCK OF THE IRISH*, a paleontologist in 1953's *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS*, a psychiatrist in 1950's *HARVEY*, and as a reporter in 1964's *HUSH HUSH SWEET CHARLOTTE*.)

It's fun to watch slinky Veronica Lake, who had already proven her way with comedy in Sturges' *SULLI-*

VAN'S TRAVELS (194X), send up her own sultry image by doing physical comedy. Wearing Wooley's pajamas, Jennifer slides down the bannister to land in a pratfall, with her feet wide apart in the air. Later (thanks to a simple but good special effect), she slides back up the bannister. What a shame that Lake got so few chances to act in comic roles.

In her autobiography, *Veronica*, written with Donald Bain (W. H. Allen, 1969), she wrote, "I was in love with the role of Jennifer, the fair witch, and told Rene I wanted the part." Clair didn't think of her as a comic actress. She talked Preston Sturges into persuading Clair to give her the role. "Rene was terribly nice to me despite his reluctance to use me in the film. And he was certainly a fine director. He had everything—timing, viewpoint, appreciation of the subtle things that make good comedy. And he had a hell of a heart. . . . He came to me after looking at rushes and said, 'I'm here to apologize, Ronni. Preston was right. You are a hell of a good comedienne. I'm sorry.'"

"I loved Rene for that."

"And I hated Fredric March."

Lake explains, "He gave me a terrible time during *I MARRIED A WITCH*. I'm sure that despite what Rene thought, March considered me a brainless little blonde sexpot, void of any acting ability and not likely to acquire any. He treated me like dirt under his talented feet."

Lake describes playing vengeful, witchy pranks on March during the filming. The 90-pound woman connived with the cameraman to hide a 40-pound weight in her costume for the scene in which Wooley carries Jennifer out of the Puritan Hotel. Another time, Lake made March pay a scene while "I carefully brought my foot up between his legs. And I moved my foot up and down, each upward movement pushing it ever so slightly into his groin. Pro that he is, he never showed his predicament during the scene." Lake writes that she and March never spoke to each other again after they finished making the movie, and lit-
tle wonder. . .

Jennifer's witchy plans to make Wooley her love slave backfire when, by accident, she drinks a love potion meant for him. She falls helplessly in love. She and her father begin working at cross purposes, for she's determined to keep her magic and win the man, too, while Daniel threatens that, if she won't start behaving like a proper, mean-spirited witch, he'll take away her powers and condemn her to live as a mere mortal.

Jennifer and Daniel lurk upstairs at Wooley's extravagant wedding ceremony and interrupt it again and again

LEFT: Political candidate Wallace Wooley (Fredric March) saves a seminude Jennifer (Veronica Lake) from a fire she herself planned in *I MARRIED A WITCH* (1942). It means more votes, so Wooley's campaign contributor Dr. Dudley White (Robert Benchley) and bride-to-be Estelle Masterson (Susan Hayward) are overjoyed. **RIGHT:** After saving Jennifer, Wooley can't get rid of her. She spends the night, shows up at his wedding the following morning, and (well, you read the title) marries him. Note: Veronica Lake does not grow in the film, except in her performance.





Cecil Kellaway is a great favorite among genre fans for his roles in *THE INVISIBLE MAN RETURNS* (1940), *THE MUMMY'S HAND* (1940), and *THE LUCK OF THE IRISH* (1948), among other films, but hit his comic highwater mark in *I MARRIED A WITCH*.

with an indoor wind storm, a murder frameup that appears to be a suicide, the revival of the "corpse," another apparent suicide, another revival, and more. Every time chaos erupts, a large soprano (Helen St. Rayner) begins warbling, "I Love You Truly," while the wedding resets, but she never makes it all the way through the mawkish song before all

hell breaks loose again. Caught between witch and bitch and their two wicked fathers, poor Wooley, in a gender role reversal, goes into a dizzy dither of indecision and swoons on the floor! Finally, he elopes with the witch (She didn't need any love potion to make him fall for her, after all.)

Even though Daniel and the Mastersons vow to ruin him, Jennifer's magic makes voters rally in the streets to cheer for Wooley, as "X" marks on the ballots move supernaturally from the opponent's box to his. More hocus-pocus: nobody—least of all the jubilant Dr. Dudley White—questions how Wooley manages to win by two million votes to nothing. (Says Wooley of his opponent: "He didn't even vote for himself.") So much for democracy and the will of a free people. There's little practical difference between Jennifer cheating through witchcraft and the Mastersons cheating through machine politics in this subversive comedy. Infiltration at high levels of the government! Even the Governor's wife is one of them! The only thing left uncorrupted is the honest love Jennifer and Wallace Wooley find together at last.

In keeping with a story, at least inspired by Thorne Smith, *I MARRIED A WITCH* races to its conclusion in a speeding car which, TOPPERlike, collides with a tree—but there the resemblance ends. This particular vehicle is a taxi in which Jennifer and Wooley, seeking to escape from Daniel, find that the old reprobate has replaced the driver and is piloting the cab hundreds of feet above the city. The tree is the old oak from whence sprang the two witches, and Daniel forces Jennifer to once again take smoky form and return to it with him.

But even though she's sacrificed her powers, Jennifer has a final trick up her sleeve. (She just doesn't have a sleeve.) Knowing Daniel can't work spells when he's sloshed, Jennifer wants to catch him in his smoke-form, hiding in a bottle, where he sings "Landlord Fill the Flowing Cup," his leitmotif. (Another gift from Preston Sturges, perhaps, who used the tune to great effect when he had gravel-voiced Eugene Pallette croak it in *THE LADY EVE*.) "For tonight I'll merry merry be / Tomorrow I'll be sober," Daniel sings—but he won't be, because Jennifer pounces with a cork and bottles him up for good.

Love is stronger than magic," she says. Still, a final scene of the happy couple years later shows possible trouble to come, in the form of a cute little daughter (played by Ann Carter, the child wunderkind of 1944's *CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE*). Seems Jennifer Jr. wears her mother's peckaboo hairstyle and likes to prance around the house on a broomstick.

Richard Quine directed *BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE*, produced by Julian Blaustein for Columbia Pictures. Daniel Taradash based his screenplay closely on John Van Druten's stage play of the same title, which Van Druten copyrighted in 1948, a year after HUAC began its witch hunt for Hollywood Commies. Irene Meyer Selznick first produced it in 1950, in New York (Rex Harrison and Lili Palmer—husband and wife at the time—starred in the production).

In the stage play, every scene takes place in one apartment. Quine's movie benefits greatly from his use of Columbia's outdoor sets. Indoors, the action moves between a storefront, where the coo, blonde witch, Gillian Holroyd (Kim Novak) sells primitive occult art (real, supplied by the Carlebach Gallery in New York), her apartment behind the store, and several other spiffy sets, including a beatnik Greenwich Village jazz joint, the Zodiac, literally an underground dive. It's the witches' special hangout, a safe place to munge, reminiscent of a gay nightclub. (There have been, over the years, several genuine Village gay bars called the Zodiac.)

At the Zodiac, the flamboyant Mrs. Bianca DePass (Hermione Gingold, a delight in the role) holds court at her regular table. She's "out" as a witch and brazen about it, as a professional witch and psychic. (The Brooklyn harpy,

Gillian calls her.) Gillian's brother, Nicky (Jack Lemmon), a frivolous young man, plays bongos in a combo in the Zodiac. He uses magic only for superficial purposes, such as unlocking Gillian's front door when she's standing right there with the key, or zapping out street lights. In contrast, Gillian, a powerful witch, prefers to stay deep in the broom closet. Their giddy biddy of an unmarried Aunt, suggestively named Queenie (Elsa Lanchester, most famous for her role as 1935's *BKID OF FRANKLIN*), has small powers that she uses in ind.screet but mostly harmless ways. For instance, she zaps the lock on the apartment door of her neighbor, solid citizen Shepherd Henderson (James Stewart), so she can snoop through his desk.

Naturally, Shep walks in on her. When he goes down stairs to ask Gillian for the use of her phone (Queenie has zapped his), the witch likes what she sees. She doesn't much like Shep's fiancée, Merle Kittridge (Janice Rule), though, when they meet at the Zodiac. They knew each other at Wellesley, where Merle had a nasty little habit of informing on people, including Gillian, with anonymous notes. Gillian retaliated with thunderstorms, which Merle fears. At the Zodiac, Gillian signals to Nicky, who saunters over with the combo to blast out a raucous version of "Stormy Weather" right in Merle's ears, while Gillian makes the club's lights flash outrageously.

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Darren (Dick York and later, Dick Sargent), forbids her to use her "natural for her, unnatural for him" talents.

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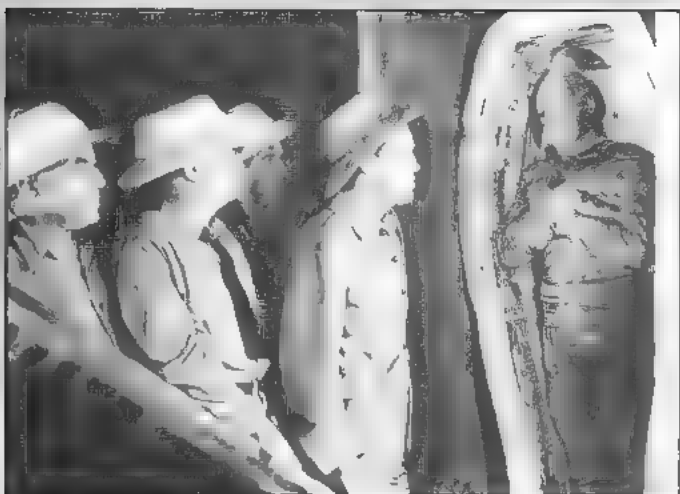
But of course sexual orientation does matter. A marriage between a gay partner and a straight partner has to be one of the most difficult of mixed marriages to sustain, yet Laughton and Lanchester managed it from 1928 until he died in 1962, despite the fact that Lanchester remained uneasy about his preference and never seems to have faced the facts squarely. She writes, "Once he told me that he had had a fellow on our sofa. The only thing I said was, 'Fine, okay, but get rid of the sofa.' We did. We sold it."

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Cecil Kellaway is a great favorite among genre fans for his roles in *THE INVISIBLE MAN RETURNS* (1940), *THE MUMMY'S HAND* (1940), and *THE LUCK OF THE IRISH* (1948), among other films, but hit his comic highwater mark in *I MARRIED A WITCH*

with an indoor wind storm, a murder frameup that appears to be a suicide, the revival of the "corpse," another apparent suicide, another revival and more. Every time chaos erupts, a large soprano (Helen St. Rayner) begins warbling, "I Love You Truly," while the wedding resets, but she never makes it all the way through the mawkish song before all

hell breaks loose again. Caught between witch and bitch and their two wicked fathers, poor Wooley, in a gender role reversal, goes into a dizzy dither of indecision and swoons on the floor! Finally, he elopes with the witch. (She didn't need any love potion to make him fall for her, after all.)

Even though Daniel and the Mastersons vow to ruin him, Jennifer's magic makes voters rally in the streets to cheer for Wooley, as "X" marks on the ballots move supernaturally from the opponent's box to his. More hocus-pocus: nobody—least of all the jubilant Dr. Dudley White—questions how Wooley manages to win by two million votes to nothing. (Says Wooley of his opponent: "He didn't even vote for himself.") So much for democracy and the will of a free people. There's little practical difference between Jennifer cheating through witchcraft and the Mastersons cheating through machine politics in this subversive comedy. Infiltration at high levels of the government! Even the Governor's wife is one of them! The only thing left uncorrupted is the honest love Jennifer and Wallace Wooley find together at last.

In keeping with a story at least inspired by Thorne Smith, *I MARRIED A WITCH* races to its conclusion in a speeding car which, TOPPERlike, collides with a tree—but there the resemblance ends. This particular vehicle is a taxi in which Jennifer and Wooley, seeking to escape from Daniel, find that the old reprobate has replaced the driver and is piloting the cab hundreds of feet above the city! The tree is the old oak from whence sprang the two witches, and Daniel forces Jennifer to once again take smoky form and return to it with him.

But even though she's sacrificed her powers, Jennifer has a final trick up her sleeve. (She just doesn't have a sleeve.) Knowing Daniel can't work spells when he's sloshed, Jennifer wants to catch him in his smoke form, hiding in a bottle, where he sings "Landlord Fill the Flowing Cup," his leitmotif. (Another gift from Preston Sturges, perhaps, who used the tune to great effect when he had gravel-voiced Eugene Pallette croak it in *THE LADY EVE*.) "For tonight I'll merry merry be / Tomorrow I'll be sober," Daniel sings—but he won't be, because Jennifer pounces with a cork and bottles him up for good.

"Love is stronger than magic," she says. Still, a final scene of the happy couple years later shows possible trouble to come, in the form of a cute little daughter (played by Ann Carter, the child wunderkind of 1944's *CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE*). Seems Jennifer Jr. wears her mother's peekaboo hairstyle and likes to prance around the house on a broomstick . . .

Richard Quine directed *BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE*, produced by Julian Blaustein for Columbia Pictures. Daniel Taradash based his screenplay closely on John Van Druten's stage play of the same title, which Van Druten copyrighted in 1948, a year after HUAC began its witch hunt for Hollywood Commies. Irene Meyer Selznick first produced it in 1950, in New York. (Rex Harrison and Lili Palmer—husband and wife at the time—starred in the production.)

In the stage play, every scene takes place in one apartment. Quine's movie benefits greatly from his use of Columbia's outdoor sets. Indoors, the action moves between a storefront, where the cool, blonde witch, Gillian Holroyd (Kim Novak) sells primitive occult art (real, supplied by the Carlebach Gallery in New York), her apartment behind the store, and several other spiffy sets, including a beatnik Greenwich Village jazz joint, the Zodiac, literally an underground dive. It's the witches' special hangout, a safe place to mingle, reminiscent of a gay nightclub. (There have been, over the years, several genuine Village gay bars called the Zodiac.)

At the Zodiac, the flamboyant Mrs. Bianca DePass (Hermione Gingold, a delight in the role) holds court at her regular table. She's "out" as a witch and brazen about it, as a professional witch and psychic. (The Brooklyn harpy,

Gillian calls her.) Gillian's brother, Nicky (Jack Lemmon), a frivolous young man, plays bongos in a combo in the Zodiac. He uses magic only for superficial purposes, such as unlocking Gillian's front door when she's standing right there with the key, or zapping out street lights. In contrast, Gillian, a powerful witch, prefers to stay deep in the broom closet. Their giddy biddy of an unmarried Aunt, suggestively named Queenie (Elsa Lanchester, most famous for her role as 1935's *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN*), has small powers that she uses in indiscreet but mostly harmless ways. For instance, she zaps the lock on the apartment door of her neighbor, solid citizen Shepherd Henderson (James Stewart), so she can snoop through his desk.

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More likely, Stewart was the other kind of "gay" bachelor, a womanizer, before he married at age 41 and settled down as the father of twins and as stepfather to his wife's children from a previous marriage.

People have tried to out Stewart in another way, too, with persistent speculations that he gave evidence to Joseph McCarthy's HUAC. The wounds HUAC inflicted on Hollywood were still raw in 1958, when *BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE* was released. Stewart was politically conservative. After arguing bitterly about McCarthyism, Stewart and his left-liberal pal, Fonda, finally saved their friendship by agreeing to quit discussing politics. As late as 1970, "Asked by the *New York Daily News Magazine*, for its June 21 edition, whether he agreed with an assertion by John Wayne that Communists posed a threat to the nation, [Stewart] responded: 'I don't think there's any question that the Communists are behind a great deal of unrest in the United States. In addition, I feel they are still a potential danger in show business.' He didn't name names." (*James Stewart: A Biography*)

Pressure on people to rat on their friends and colleagues was among the most odious aspects of the HUAC era, strongly reminiscent of the witch hunts, where judges coerced the accused to save themselves by "crying out" other witches. Of course, some informants didn't need very much encouragement. *BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE* comes close to allegory when Nicky voluntarily begins spilling names to a scruffy writer of popular books on the occult, Sidney Redlitch (Ernie Kovacs).

Shep, who's a publisher, mentions to Gillian that he'd like to meet this writer and perhaps persuade him to write for his company. Conveniently, Nicky gives Gillian a summoning spell for Christmas. (That's a little weird, to see pagans swapping Christmas presents—though, come to think of it, Gillian's tree, a modern art piece of seven stacked, wooden rings fitted with large bulbs, looks nothing like a conventional Christmas tree and a lot like an upright version of the seven-ringed spiral labyrinth.) Gillian uses the spell to fetch the author from Mexico. ("I think I want to see you," he says on arrival at Shep's office.)

Redlitch, a drunk (played with relish by Kovacs, known to take a drink or six himself), describes his book in progress, *Magic in Manhattan, or Witchcraft Around Us*: "It's right here. New York is full of 'em. . . . There's a whole community of them."

Shep asks, "What do they look like?"

"Like anybody else," Redlitch says. "Like her." He points to Shep's secretary, Tina (Bek Nelson). "Like him." He points to Shep's business partner, Andy White (Howard McNear, who was definitely otherworldly as Mayberry's Floyd the Barber on *THE ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW*.)

In other words, they're everywhere! How familiar this sounds. It's the language of McCarthyism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia.

He goes on, "Of course you can contact them. They have their hangouts and they're open to the public—cafés and bars and nightclubs. They've got a place there in the Village—the Zodiac. Over in Brooklyn there's one. . . ."

In Gillian's apartment later, with Gillian, Nicky, Queenie, and Shep present, Redlitch, with a knowing smirk

on his face, boasts that he can spot witches. "They can't cry or blush, and if you throw them in the water, they float. . . . The Zodiac, that's their headquarters. The place is infested with 'em." Playing dumb, Nicky asks Redlitch how he knows. Redlitch says, "Just take a good look at the proprietor some time."

Nicky: Well, you'd never know it to look at him, would you?

Redlitch: You wouldn't, but I would.

Gillian: You can recognize them?

"Like a shot," says Redlitch smugly. Little does he know that three of the four people in the room with him are witches! "It's a look or a feeling or something. I can't put my finger on it, but if one came in here right now, I'd know 'em in a minute."

By this time, the three witches are having a hard time keeping their faces straight. "Yeah. . . . I wonder if we know any of 'em?" asks Nicky.

Gillian smiles innocently. "I wonder. I suppose there's lots of it around."

Having parodied standard heterosexual talk about homosexuality, the discussion now becomes more reminiscent of paranoia about political espionage, as Gillian asks, "Tell me, Mr. Redlitch, is it safe to write about all this? I mean, aren't you afraid of reprisals?"

Redlitch replies, "As a matter of fact I am, but you see, there's a woman very high up in the movement. Now, if I can find her, I hope to get her on my side."

At the end of the visit, Gillian privately asks Nicky to divert Redlitch from seeking out Mrs. DePass, who might help him shine a harmful spotlight on their underground community (Even Redlitch's name suggests this possibility.) Nicky complies, but he does so by staging a goofy coming-out-of-the-closet scene and aiming the spotlight directly at himself. As the two

men walk down the street together (Redlitch looking for either a drink or an all-night barber shop), Nick suggests that the writer needs a collaborator, an insider with special knowledge.

Redlitch puffs himself up. "I am as in as anybody but one of them himself could be." Nicky offers to get him one of them, but Redlitch says, "You're naive, boy. They're very tight with their trade secrets. They wouldn't—I couldn't ever get near a deal like that."

Nicky leans in and says, in a conspiratorial tone and with Jack Lemmon's patented raised eyebrows and wicked grin (it's the same face he makes when, in 1959's *SOME LIKE IT HOT*, he prepares to tell Marilyn Monroe he's not a girl), "You are nearer than you think."

Redlitch does a doubletake. Despite his boasts, it's obvious that he never suspected a thing about Nicky, who promptly proves he's a witch by turning green, making a car horn blare, and putting out some street lights. It's a funny scene, but it's also comedy with a satiric edge. It's not a relic of times gone by, either. Here's Presidential hopeful and Arizona Senator John McCain, "Rambling along back roads in quest of independent voters" in New Hamp-



"Back to the tree!"—and it's no surprise. Thorne Smith stories (even when he doesn't write them) always seem to involve cars hitting what only God can make.



LEFT: In *BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE* (1958), Store proprietor Gillian Holroyd and book publisher Shep Henderson (Kim Novak and James Stewart) meet cute, supernaturally speaking, when Gillian's Aunt Queenie puts a hex on Shep's phone. You see, Queenie's a witch—but then, so is Gillian. **RIGHT:** Romance goes on the rocks when Shep learns that Gillian cast a spell to make him fall in love with her (just as Jennifer tries unsuccessfully to do with Wallace Wooley in *I MARRIED A WITCH*). Shep storms out, after first presenting Gillian with a broom. **BELOW:** Endora (Agnes Moorehead) and Samantha (Elizabeth Montgomery) strike witchy poses for *BEWITCHED*.

shire on January 17, 2000, claiming that "he can identify a gay person 'by behavior and by attitudes . . . I think that it's clear to some of us when some people have that life-style'" (Mike Allen, "McCain Says He Can Identify Gays By Behavior, Attitudes," *The Washington Post*, January 18, 2000).

In the same article, Kevin D. Ivers, the public affairs director of the Log Cabin Republicans, was unfazed by McCain's back roads remarks. "If there's a gay person anywhere who says they can't walk into a room and tell who some of the gay people are, they're lying."

Of course, there's some truth here about "gaydar" signalling to like-minded people, as John Van Druten points out in some lines from the stage production that aren't in the movie. In the play, Redlitch says of Mrs. DePass's witchcraft, "She's pretty open about it. Kind of flaunts it. Some of them do, you know. Go about dressed up so that people will recognize them." True enough, up to a point, but the choice of vocabulary reveals Redlitch's bigoted opinion of the few facts he knows, and Ivers' comment glosses over one major point: as with Redlitch and witches, it isn't a gay person claiming to be able to recognize another gay person, it's Senator John McCain . . .

Or is that presumptuous?

When Gillian finds out that Nicky's been collaborating with Redlitch, she's upset enough to hex the book, to make sure nobody will ever publish it. Nicky takes revenge by interfering in Gillian's romance, though it's actually Queenie who blurts out to Shep that he's spellbound. In a terrible fight, Shep and Gillian break up.

Nicky and Redlitch drive Shep to Brooklyn and Mrs. DePass, who removes the love spell. This service doesn't come cheap, in more ways than one. In Stewart's best moment in the film, Shep cringes over a large bowl full of Mrs. DePass's disgusting, murky brew. She stands over him like a dominatrix, rolling her "R" as she orders him, "Drrrrrink!"

His nose wrinkles and his lips curl back as he tastes

"Drrrrrink! Drrrrrrrink!"

An expression of abject humiliation and revulsion on his face, Shep glugs down his medicine like a good dog (true to his nickname), his eyes stricken over the rim of the huge bowl as he tries to find anything to look at other than the blowsy Mrs. DePass gloating, not just over him, but over her power to thwart Gillian.

Shep never wants to see Gillian again, but Mrs. DePass says he must, just once, to affirm his freedom from her ("Nice of her to make that a condition," fumes Gillian.)

When he performs this last embarrassing and upsetting task and moves out of the building (handing Gillian a broom as a parting shot), he's clean at last—but he doesn't feel clean.

Unlike Shep, who outs Gillian when he tells Merle that her former classmate is a witch (Merle makes a remark about Shep never learning how to spell), HUAC never called James Stewart to name names in public. Stewart, for all his right-wing political beliefs, comes across as a decent, high-principled man, not the kind to secretly rat on friends and colleagues. Still, his military background (he was a genuine war hero, a pilot with many dangerous, successful bombing missions during World War II) had taught him the discipline of secrecy. If there's any substance to the rumors (and that's a very big "if"), at some point he might have felt

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Book Ends

The Scarlet Street Review of Books

REPTILICUS: THE SCREENPLAY

Kip Doto
Bayou Publishing, Inc
\$21.99

Most genuine aficionados of the cinema can probably cite one particular film that leapt off the silver screen and seared a permanent impression on their psyches, regardless of its reputation in the film-going community. My own choice, for instance, is Robert Wise's pseudo epic HELEN OF TROY (1955). In tandem with the Book People of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, cineastes would love to create a legacy preserving their particular sentimental favorite.

Kip Doto has achieved his personal Holy Grail, compiling a book about Sidney Pink's Danish/American monster movie REPTILICUS (1962). In defiance of the critical pantheon's consensus, Doto has afforded his subject an affectionate and comparatively exhaustive tribute. The original 1960 screenplay by Ib Melchior represents the cornerstone of the volume, though some readers might regard it as the book's least entertaining element. Doto touches on Pink's own history, tracing some of his business practices that laid the groundwork for the eventual production.

The text's focus remains fixed on the differences between the Danish and American release editions. For example, Reptilicus was depicted as a flying creature in the Danish version, but AIP editors clipped his wings for stateside engagements. As compensation, the grounded beast was optically endowed with the ability to projectile-vomit a foul concoction of acid slime. The author notes casting differences between the two national release prints, as well as providing looping credits for the yank version. (Scenarist Melchior dubbed six of the characters!) Doto even includes a translation of the song "Tillicus," which was only heard in the Danish edition. With such lyrics as "It is wild—spits fire, and frightens even the smoked herrings!," that's probably just as well.

The book also provides a comprehensive portrait of the American advertising

campaign. Several items are reproduced in color, including poster art, the covers of the two Charlton Reptilicus comic books (as well as their spinoff publication *Reptilicus the Terrible*), the original set of eight lobby cards, and assorted stills. The complete American pressbook is reprinted in B&W, along with additional cast and behind-the-scenes photos, and three Monster Laffs trading cards that weren't funny then and aren't funny now. The front and back covers of the infamous Monarch Books' paperback tie-in, penned by house hack Dean Owen, also appear. The tone of the novelization is apparent in the back-cover blurb: "Svend Alstrup, his aide, was remembering Karen's wanton seduction of him and hoping for a repeat performance" (I do wish that Doto had quoted some more nuggets from its "lance of his manhood" brand of unseemly prose).

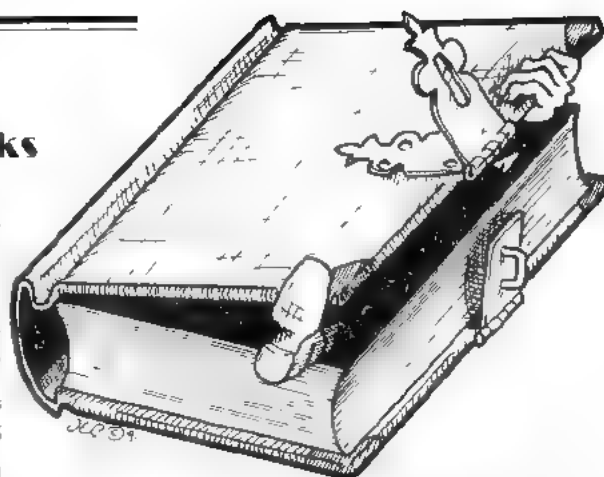
All in all, *Reptilicus: The Screenplay* provides an entertaining study of the early sixties production and marketing of Sidney Pink's opus. Issued by the small press CCP Bayou Publishing, the reproduction of the vintage materials is better than satisfactory. The binding is somewhat suspect, however. The author's commentary, by his own admission, is hardly impartial, but there's no pontification about the film's merits, no scholarly defense of its inconsistencies. Doto is content to portray his subject at face value, and in the process provides a treasure trove of related memorabilia. He even displays a woeful Danish attempt at promoting the picture as a comedy on home video, featuring caricatures and a title that translates as *ON A FIRST NAME BASIS WITH THE MONSTER*. Fans of such ephemera will greatly enjoy this book—even if they have no intention of actually reading the screenplay.

—John F. Black

COUNT DRACULA GOES TO THE MOVIES

—Lyndon W. Joslin
McFarland & Company Inc., 1999
Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640
237 pages—\$44

Calm your fears, Scarlet Readers. Count Dracula, Lord of the Undead, hasn't taken a day job as a movie critic. Lyndon W. Joslin's book covers the many film versions of Bram Stoker's classic 1897 novel, from NOSFERATU in 1922 through DRACULA DEAD AND LOVING IT in 1995. Along the way, Joslin strays from the Borgo Pass to investigate such dark side streets as DRACULA'S DAUGHTER (1936), THE BRIDES OF DRACULA (1960), JONATHAN (1970), COUNT YOR-



GA (1970), and NADJA (1994). Additionally, the author touches on sequels in which the bloodthirsty Vampire King actually shows up, including HOUSE OF DRACULA (1945), ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN (1948), DRACULA, PRINCE OF DARKNESS (1965), DRACULA HAS RISEN FROM THE GRAVE (1968), and THE SATANIC RITES OF DRACULA (1973).

The book's chapters are set up in fairly standard form—synopsis, followed by commentary and musical notes—but Joslin writes in an accessible and entertaining style. For a change, McFarland and Company provides an attractive cover design (though it's odd to feature Yorga instead of Dracula on a volume with this particular title), and the photo repro inside is considerably crisper than in recent volumes from this company.

As for the count taking a day job, don't scoff—Joslin rightly points out that the Dracula of Stoker's novel puts in several appearances in broad daylight, and that it was the movies, starting with NOSFERATU, that made the rays of the sun so deadly to vampires.

—Drew Sullivan

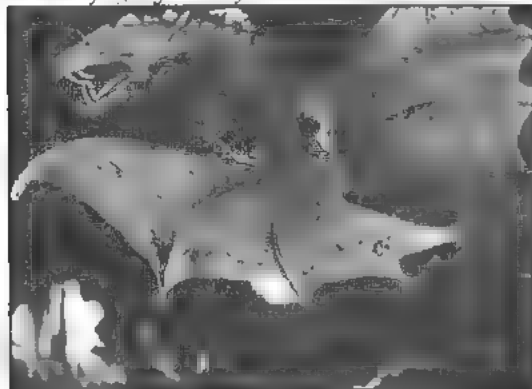
SCREEN AND SCREEN AGAIN

Continued from page 21

make the film just different enough to be noteworthy.

THE DEVIL BAT on Side B is one of Lugosi's most beloved—perhaps the most beloved—poverty row outing. This title predates his Monogram period, coming instead from the even more parsimonious Producers Releasing Corporation (or PRC). The film may be more logical than its Monogram successors, but that doesn't make it even slightly more believable or better made. The real difference is that everyone involved—including Bela—seems to be in on the joke, something that only might be true of two Monogram offerings (THE APE MAN and VODOO MAN). While the film is played for horror, the approach is more than a little tongue in cheek. Here Lugosi is Dr. Paul Carruthers (no, the name clearly doesn't fit the man's accent), a scientific genius whose cold cream "form-oo-lah" (as Lugosi invariably says) founded a great cos-

It's the flighty star of 1962's REPTILICUS!



metics company, leaving him a lowly employee. In order to revenge himself on the 'rich and happy' owners of the concern, Carruthers breeds and glandularly stimulates giant bats that will attack and kill anyone wearing his special aftershave. It's silly stuff, with dubious effects (the bats often look like slabs of meat being hurled through the air) and the screwiest set of secret passages in the history of film. (Not only are they spacious enough to double as Bela's attic, judging by the discarded furniture littering them, but they lead to a secret room with a very obvious window!) Still, DEVIL BAT is set apart by Lugosi's most outrageous villainy and the aforementioned tongue-in-cheekiness. ("Just rub a little on the tender part of your neck," Carruthers instructs his victims; then answers their, "Goodnight, Doctors," with a transparent, "Good-bye.") PRC liked the plot so much that they reworked it in 1942 for George Zucco's THE MAD MONSTER (subbing bib-overalled werewolf Glenn Strange for the bat) and with Zucco again in 1945 as THE FLYING SERPENT (this time featuring a great hokey lizard-bird puppet). As much fun as these may be, it is Lugosi's DEVIL BAT that rules the roost—61 minutes of poverty row fun at its best.

Roan's presentation is quite the best these titles have ever looked on home video, though the soundtrack isn't in the best shape on THE CORPSE VANISHES owing to the source material, and there is some notable speckling on both CORPSE and DEVIL BAT. There are helpful chapter stops, a scanty production history (which repeats the hard to grasp assertion that Elizabeth Russell refused to lie in her coffin/bed in THE CORPSE VANISHES, which she very clearly does), and a cast and credits listing (which misspells Gwen Kenyon as "Gewn"), but the real point is seeing these titles at last with such clarity and sharpness.

—Ken Hanke

KATHLEEN FREEMAN

Continued from page 53

proscenium arch entirely. In his work, the camera moves. The camera is a participant all the time, whereas in the theater you're the only one that's participating—and nothing is moving except the actors. You know, if a director knows what to "select to show" to tell their story, you're in Heaven! A lot of them are really great at it, while some are still learning—and of course, some never learn! Or, at least not to my taste. To actually decide what you're going to show in order to tell your story takes a great deal of "point of view"—and having a view about what it is you're telling.

SS: O HENRY'S FULL HOUSE was a multidirectional effort on the parts of Henry Hathaway, Henry Kostner, Jean Negulesco, Howard Hawks, and Henry King. Who directed your segment?

KF: Howard Hawks—and I thought that was a gem piece of work! Again, it had a lot to do with somebody being there in full support.



SS: By this time were comfortable working with Hawks

KF: Absolutely! But, for that matter, I've been comfortable with almost everybody. First of all, I come from a place called: Oh boy, do I love this! (Laughs) That's where I start—and I think that makes a big difference in what you do. And then, to be surrounded by legendary people is just wonderful!

SS: Such as Cary Grant? You appeared in four of his films: 1952's MONKEY BUSINESS, 1953's DREAM WIFE, 1957's KISS THEM FOR ME, and 1958's HOUSEBOAT

KF: Well, he was a really incredible figure, number one—aside from his handsomeness and the remarkable style that he had. I also think he was a devilishly good actor. He was brilliant. I remember, he came to the set of O HENRY'S FULL HOUSE one day to visit Howard Hawks, and he watched me working. I'd never met him, but, just before we broke for lunch, he came over and introduced himself. He was very gracious and told me I was terribly funny—and, of course, I thanked him. Then, later, when he was working on DREAM WIFE, he called me on the phone at home and said, "It's the funniest line in the picture, and I want you to do it." Well, I didn't even believe it was really him on the phone! But, it was—and I did do the line! That's always been a wonderful memory for me. To think that one of the greatest leading men in the history of this business called me up personally to come do this one line in his movie—well, it's just great! Every time I saw him after that, whether it was working with him in something or so cially, we always had a very warm rapport. I know that he knew I thought he was like—white on rice! (Laughs)

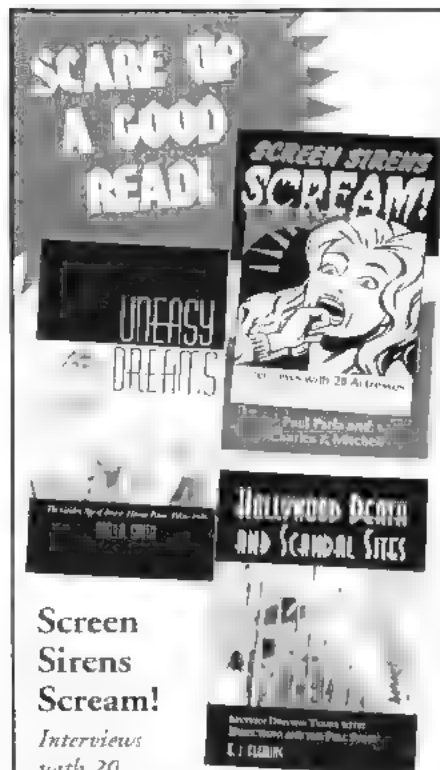
SS: His first love was comedy, wasn't it?

KF: Oh, yes! He was brilliant at it! Brilliant! Some of the oldest stuff, that he did years ago, still works.

SS: Scarlet Street covers a lot of sci fi and fantasy films, so here's a title that you might not often be asked about. 1953's MAGNETIC MONSTER.

KF: I'm not sure I even remember! I think I was some sort of secretary to a scientist, and doing scenes in a lab. I do remember being in scenes where the atmosphere was very grave—and doing a lot of nodding! Agreeing with the scientist who says we're all doomed! We're all in a quandary and looking very sage while we're trying to figure out a solution, which we all do on a daily basis, anyway! (Laughs) I know it wasn't a big, creative

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THORNE SMITH

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A discouraging note: *Topper* became the first film to be subjected to the ill-advised colorization process. Because of this, Turner has yet to give this must-have film a quality video or DVD release.

TOPPER TAKES A TRIP is the Hal Roach sequel released in 1939 by United Artists. Roland Young, Constance Bennett, Billie Burke, and Alan Mowbray (as Wilkins, the *Toppers'* butler) all return for more ghostly hijinx courtesy of Roy Seawright and crew's continually impressive special effects. Due to his noninterest and nonaffordable salary, Cary Grant appears as George only briefly in a flashback to the first film. *TOPPER*—along with Leo McCarey's *THE AWFUL TRUTH* (also 1937)—put Grant over the top as a genuine star. His fan mail leaped from 200 to 1,400 a week and his asking price leaped even higher. While obviously not a classic, *TOPPER TAKES A TRIP* is still a lot of fun. Unfortunately, it can be found only in a poor-quality colorized version.

TOPPER RETURNS completed the film series in 1941, and is featured elsewhere in this issue of *Scarlet Street*. It is also available on video in a substandard, colorized version, though it was released on laser in black-and-white. All three films cry out for remastering and released in the original monotone on VHS and DVD!

TURNABOUT starred Carole Landis and John Hubbard as Sally and Tim Willows, the young married couple constantly bickering about their lives until a magic talisman switches their personalities. Hal Roach produced and directed this 1940 United Artists comedy. Critical opinion has always been sharply divided, with some finding the film an unsung masterpiece of screwball comedy, while others find it supremely tasteless and flat.

In addition to the film adaptations of Thorne Smith's novels, the Broadway play *IF I WERE YOU* was produced in 1938 starring Constance Cummings. *IF I WERE YOU* was based on *Turnabout*, but drew poor reviews and quickly disappeared. Television proved to be a friendlier venue, with *TOPPER* becoming a well-loved series in the early fifties. Leo G. Carroll stepped into the role of Cosmo Topper, while real-life marrieds Anne Jeffreys and Robert Sterling assumed the characters of the Kerbys. The series never posted huge ratings, but it remained a public favorite despite its ethereal journey from NBC to ABC and finally CBS, each move occurring in successive years. A 1979 series

pilot starring Kate Jackson, Andrew Stevens, Jack Warden, and Rue McClanahan was disappointing, as was the short-lived 1979 series *TURNABOUT*, featuring John Schuck and Sharon Gless. In 1997, *TOPPER: THE MUSICAL* premiered at the Helen Hayes Performing Arts Center in New York. A new film remake of *TOPPER* is currently under development by *BLAST FROM THE PAST* and *WKRP IN CINCINNATI* creator Hugh Wilson.

And Now, in Conclusion

In the years following his death, Thorne Smith's popularity reached its greatest heights. Most of his novels were reprinted in the forties by Pocket Books and set sales records during World War II. He was the first author to sell one million and subsequently five million copies in paperback. His books continued to be reprinted up through 1980. Most have drifted out of print since, with the exception of Modern Library's recent reissue of *Topper* and their upcoming reprints of *Topper Takes a Trip* and *Night Life of the Gods*, both scheduled to bring Thorne Smith into the new century.

Thorne Smith's impact on fiction and film has been subtle and seldom noted. Writers as diverse as H. Allen Smith, Henry Kuttner, Robert Bloch, and Ray Bradbury have cited his influence, while others such as James Thurber simply reveal it in work such as "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." The film versions of his books created a movie genre that encompasses works ranging from *HEAVEN CAN WAIT* (1978) and *AI WAYS* (1989) to *GHOSTBUSTERS* and *BEETLEJUICE*. Ideas from his novels have made themselves apparent in films such as *SPLASH* (1984) and *COCOON* (1985), as well as TV shows such as *I DREAM OF JEANNIE*, *MR. ED*, and *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*, prompting *Armchair Detective*



TOPPER on television starred Anne Jeffreys and Robert Sterling as the Kerbys, with Leo G. Carroll and Lee Patrick as Mr. and Mrs. Topper.

magazine in 1993 to dub him "the father of the supernatural sitcom." (In 1997, *The New York Times* claimed Smith had "created the modern American ghost.") Thorne Smith was a man who left no memoirs and no journals, no record of his time here—save for his books—but in many ways he left us so much more. To quote from *Topper Takes a Trip*, he left us "A sweet sort of souvenir, a romantic keepsake. A little reminder of a moment of glorious folly."

Michael D. Walker is currently working on the first ever biography of *Topper* creator Thorne Smith and welcomes info at Walkm@aol.com



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TOPPER RETURNS

Continued from page 59

whose sensible conversation has the knack of sounding not more plausible than his wife's blathering "Where's the body?" asks Roberts. "I don't know," chatters Topper helplessly. "So you admit there is a body?" Roberts asks in passing triumph. "Yes. I came over here to look for it," explains Topper. "How did you know it was here?" presses the detective

Topper: She told me.

Roberts: She? Who's she?

Topper: The dead girl.

Roberts: Well, now we're get. . . wait a minute. How could a dead person talk?

Topper: I don't know, but this one does. Oh, I mean, I know you won't believe what I'm going to tell you, but

Roberts: Did you or did you not try to stab this young lady?

Mrs. Topper: Don't be ridiculous, officer. Cosmo wouldn't stab anybody. Why, he can't even carve a turkey!

Before complete chaos descends, Gail foists the Sergeant's gun into Topper's hand and forces him to lock the rest of the household in the icebox. Then she drags him off to find her body—still withholding the piece of evidence (the forged note) that proves his innocence. Fortunately, Eddie—who has been at the mercy of the playful sea, for some time now ("You're tired? How do you think I feel?" he asks when the animal yawns)—happens to witness the killer's minions taking Gail's body out to an offshore yacht. Again, the film shifts gears and becomes a worthy addition to less winsome thrillers, a mood temporarily dispelled by cutaways to the bulk of the cast escaping from the icebox and Topper mistaking Eddie for the killer. "Eddie! Where have you been?" asks Topper. "Boss, that's something I'll never know," answers Eddie. "You still looking for a body?" It was down there, but it just left. It just put out to sea. That's the truth, boss, but I ain't going back to prove it." Needless to say, he ends up doing so. Back in the cavern, the film smoothly reverts to straight thriller mode and even flirts with some more poetic imagery when it turns out that Topper is no oarsman and the invisible Gail eerily rows a boat out to the yacht. ("No, it ain't," reasons Eddie, only to realize, "Yes, it is!") He address his lantern: "If you go out, I'm going with you!"

Despite being blessed with some surprisingly effective black humor about the corpse and how to dispose of it, the sequence in which Gail and Topper steal back her body is the weakest in *TOPPER RETURNS*. We suddenly find ourselves in an unsatisfactory slapstick world better suited to Hal Roach's Laurel and Hardy comedies, with two extraneous characters who seem like positive intruders in the otherwise ensemble cast. It isn't so much that the material is bad, but it's entirely out of joint with the rest of the film. Happily, the scene isn't so extended that it seriously mars the movie, which quickly gets back to cases when Roberts "catches" Topper returning with the body. Gail proves a rather touchy cadaver, taking exception to Roberts' comments on the size of her feet and, after slapping and kicking him over his ungallant observation, taking off to the trophy room/bar to drown his insults in liquor. Certain he has the goods on Topper, Roberts grills him. "Innocent men stay home nights, they don't hide in iceboxes, and they don't take dead bodies on boat rides! Why did you kill her?" "I didn't!" protests Topper. "That's only one man's opinion," sneers Roberts. "I can prove it," insists Topper, asking to be left alone in the trophy room with Gail. "Oh ho! I'm not that dumb," laughs Roberts. "Well, that's only one man's opinion, too," chimes in Bob



An old dark house, a hooded killer, a damsel (Carole Landis) in distress—*TOPPER RETURNS* (1941) used all the old clichés and stood them on their ear.

Assured that there are neither windows nor iceboxes in the trophy room, Roberts allows Topper three minutes. Unfortunately, Gail is no longer in a fit state to be of much help, owing to the quantity of alcohol she's poured into herself (This is definitely Thorne Smith country.) After some comic byplay (including a remarkable effect that has Gail popping in and out of sight as Topper tries to shake her back to sobriety), she recovers sufficiently to produce notes that prove Lillian to be the author of her supposed explanation, which is enough evidence to get the housekeeper the Roberts Treatment. "I wasn't alone in this! I wrote the note, but I didn't kill her!" Lillian tells him. In a moment of outrageous stylishness, Del Ruth stops the film dead for a series of sinister closeups of the assembled red herrings (especially bulging-eyed Zucco, who actually wiggles his ears in excitement!) Roberts asks, "Come on—who did it?" "It . . . it was . . ." starts Lillian, cuing the lights to go out and a scream to be heard. When the lights come up, she is, of course, gone. (It is the wise film that knows just when to pander to our expectations!) "Whoever stole that witness, put her back!" demands Roberts.

The film, no slowpoke to begin with, moves into high gear at this point, with Ann left alone when everyone goes to investigate Mrs. Topper's recreational screaming. ("That's fun, isn't it?") Never in the history of film has an imperilled leading lady been put at risk of secret passages and a cloaked assailant for anything near so screwy a reason as this! Ann's abduction, however, is played with remarkable seriousness and her state of peril is actually enhanced by the film's cutaways to strictly comic material—not the least of which involves Eddie sitting in the trick chair that disposed of Lillian and landing himself back in the drink and at the mercy of the delighted seal. ("You better keep away from me, or you'll be a coat!") Even while playing to our expectations, the film is constantly surprising. Sure, Bob's heroics are movie-hero lame when he dukes it out with the killer, and naturally he spends the bulk of the encounter on the floor, but in *TOPPER RETURNS* our ghost—a lady ghost at that—lets him think he's the hero, even though it's she who actually rescues Ann. Intertwined with the plot is the galloping insanity of the characters themselves, especially Billie Burke's Mrs. Topper, who has only to see Eddie, dripping wet after his second dunking in the subterranean grotto, to ask, "Edward, you're all wet. Is it raining out? Oh, but you haven't been out. It can't be raining in. Well, if it has, it's all cleared up." (When Eddie takes his third such plunge—courtesy of the trick chair—she merely notes, "Well, that's a silly way to leave the room! Why didn't he use the door?" before deciding that such a chair would be very useful for weekend guests!)

It's a nice touch that Eddie's moist misfortunes are again (as with locating the corpse) the source of the mystery's solution. "Boss, that chair is deceptive, destructible, distrustworthy, and this is the voice of experience!" he cautions Topper. "Boss, you sit in that chair and things happen—quick!" This gives Topper the key to trap the murderer—Mr. Carrington (or rather, the duplicitous business partner of the long-dead Carrington)

The revelation of the killer and high-speed car-chase climax seem a little perfunctory after the preceding inventiveness, but the film remains funny and lively—and it's accomplished with some genuinely stunning model work, which, like all the special effects, is splendid (The invisibility effects far outshine anything Universal was then doing and are invariably much more clever, as when Gail "zips" herself into invisibility—a move recalling the splendid optical wipes that festooned Roach's Laurel and Hardy comedies—or renders herself transparent by hitting herself over the head with a billy club, which remains poised in the air)

There's a certain rightness, too, in having the final Topper film end with a car wreck, bringing the series full circle to where it all began with the Kerbys and their unfortunate encounter with a tree. Gail, Eddie, and Carrington's ghost even get to sit on that same old log from the first film for a final gag. It is a nice, unforced touch with which to conclude a film that is full of just such touches. Perhaps TOPPER RETURNS isn't quite in the same league as such all-time classics of Old Dark Housedom as Paul Leni's THE CAT AND THE CANARY (1927) or James Whale's THE OLD DARK HOUSE (1932), but neither is it far afield from those gems of the genre, and it certainly deserves far more attention than it has received over the years

Roberts. Who are you?

Mrs. Topper: I'm Mrs. Topper. Who are you?

Roberts. Mrs. Topper! Where's your husband?

Mrs. Topper. In the icebox

Roberts. Has he got the body with him?

Mrs. Topper: Certainly—under his overcoat

You'll search far and wide to find another such film whose comic shenanigans can make such hair brained dialogue not only funny, but true ...



PARAMOUNT HORRORS

Continued from page 37

specimen, who, on seeing the ape in question, decides that the good doctor needs to visit the sergeant. Far from dissipating the tension of the film's finale, this comic bit actually increases it, coming at a point where Susan is at the mercy of Bruhl and Larry Reed, who are convinced she knows who is avenging her brother. The climactic encounter with the ape, Bruhl, and Reed works nicely, because it isn't overplayed and it neatly sidesteps no less than three generic conventions: One) bullets do mortally wound the ape, Two) though there is a brief enigmatic moment between the ape and Susan before he dies, the anticipated actual moment of recognition never comes, and Three) nothing is done to soften the grimness of the ending—the camera merely records the grisly tableau and descends to the street below to settle on Scot's faithful dog mourning the loss of his master. The cumulative effect, again suggestive of the Lewton films, is to make what might otherwise be a rather silly B picture into something genuinely moving and even disturbing.



Will Garth's novel of *Dr. Cyclops* (1940) was considerably more phallic than the film—at least on its cover!

To Be Continued

REAR WINDOW

Continued from page 62

Disney's CINDERELLA (195X), became the fastest selling record up to that point in time, and the Theodore, Simon, and Alvin industry was born. Bagdasarian also wrote (with his cousin, playwright William Saroyan) Rosemary Clooney's career-launching 1951 smash, "Come-On A My House" (which was also the first Armenian pop hit, aside, perhaps, from Khachaturian's "Sabre Dance")

This treasure-trove of trivia aside, REAR WINDOW gives new meaning to the hackneyed expression, "a whole new experience in sight and sound" but it truly is that. And, as with Hitchcock's VERTIGO (195X), also brilliantly restored by Harris and James C. Katz, Universal's recent digital restoration gives new life to both the stylish visuals and complexly sophisticated soundtrack of a fascinating and highly entertaining late-period Hitchcock classic.

While admittedly some of the film's plot machinations may seem a bit farfetched today—didn't any of these people hear of window blinds?—it is as a perceptive study of romantic/erotic ambivalence and depressingly understandable marital panic in the "fancy free" single male that REAR WINDOW emphatically retains its power to move and subtly shock. As a thriller, the film may be somewhat implausible Hitchcock, but as a study of conflicted human emotions, impulses, and expectations—especially in this age of obsessively dictated "family values"—REAR WINDOW rings truer than ever.

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BARKIS IS WILLING!

KATHLEEN FREEMAN

Continued from page 73

role. It was a good movie, though, and, like most of the monster movies, they were all very popular and people just seem to love them.

SS: The film was directed by Curt Siodmak.

KF: Well, I knew that he was a legendary name. I was glad to have the job—and, of course, anything he told me to do, I tried to do. He was well-known and highly respected. I remember him being very purposeful about the film; I think he was trying to elevate it beyond just a simple little B movie. I haven't seen it since it was made, but I'm sure it's showing somewhere all the time, because many of those films are considered cult classics today.

SS: Here's me that definitely is. 1958's *THE FLY*. You appeared as Emma, the maid. Did the film's premise initially strike you as being slightly ridiculous?

KF: Well, no. I think, when man uses his imagination to ask "What if?," that one of two things happens. It's either going to scare the heck out of you, or it's going to be funny as the dickens! (Laughs) I thought, "Wow! What if a guy really did create this kind of machine? And what if there's a fly in there—and he doesn't know it?" It's a real wild "What if?" And it's kind of wonderfully scary. I had a good part in the film—because I almost killed him.

SS: By swatting him? So you had no problem playing a maid instructed to look for a fly with a white head?

KF: I tell you—one of the big things, at least for me when it comes to acting, is to take myself out of the equation. If you asked me personally, I would probably do a lot of hee-hawing and double over in laughter. "What the hell are you talking about?"—but that was not the lady I was playing. Emma's simply the maid in this house. She's being paid by these

people and has respect for the wife, who seems sincerely desperate. So, ultimately, Emma's going to do what the wife asks her to do, and without opinion about it—that is, until maybe later when she goes in her room and laughs herself silly about the whole thing! You know what I mean? I take Kathleen out of the play. She's not in there anymore. She's now the lady she's playing, because my own opinion of things won't necessarily be the same as

Kathleen Freeman lent able comic support opposite former Maverick James Garner in both **SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SHERIFF!** (1969) and **SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL GUNFIGHTER** (1971).



the character I'm playing. I can't have that conflict. I'm guided by the character, and if she's fully cognizant of this woman's desperation, she's going to do whatever it takes to satisfy her. That's the best way I know how to explain it.

SS: That pretty much says it all. *THE FLY* starred Vincent Price. . . .

KF: Well, he was another legendary figure—and I think he was fascinating. Although I only had a couple of lines with him in the movie, we'd occasionally run into each other over the years at parties or dinner get-togethers. He was a very nice man and I always admired him. He was extremely witty—and a magnificent cook—as well as being a master in art circles. I remember, there was a big opening in St. Louis one time. I was there doing a play. We both ended up at the museum, so I got to spend a lot of time with him and his wife. It was great! He's really a kind of magical figure to me, because, like many actors, he was multit talented. Besides being a wonderful cook, he had an unbelievable amount of knowledge on art. Eddie G. Robinson, with whom I did a picture many, many years ago, and whom I'd known over the years, was a damn good artist himself! I just love the possibility of the multit talents of people in the arts! It impresses me—and makes me very happy to be around them. They're wide-ranged—and certainly, Mr. Price was, too.

Next Issue:
**Kathleen
Freeman**
meets
The Nutty Professor

OUT OF THE BROOM CLOSET

Continued from page 71

that patriotic duty required him to give information confidentially—assuming he ever knew anything to report.

The investigations into the entertainment industry stirred up little more than dust and smoke. Nearly all of the few genuine Hollywood Reds were former Trotskyists, long since disenchanted with Stalin, the kinds of people Theodore Roosevelt dismissed as “parlor bolshevists” (in *Metropolitan Magazine*, June, 1918). Most of these cocktail party members wouldn’t have known how to subvert a Sunday school picnic, let alone the United States government. It’s hard to believe Stewart would have thought it worthwhile to tattle on them, if that meant selling out his own integrity. Since records of some closed-door HUAC meetings still remain sealed, though, there’s no proof about Stewart, one way or the other—yet.

Stewart had also defended himself on the opposite side of the Red Scare—oddly enough, in a controversy over the Frank Capra movie, *MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON* (1939). Ludicrous as this sounds today, some conservatives considered the patriotic *MR. SMITH* anti American at the time, because it depicted corruption in high places. Some senators reacted to a special showing of the movie by walking out in a rage. For all those reasons, it’s ironically amusing to watch Stewart play a publisher falling in love with a member of a cabal of subversives living undetected in the arty corners of New York City—but play him he does, with the abundance of talent that made him one of Hollywood’s greatest and most versatile stars.

Kim Novak carried some personal baggage through *BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE*, too. During the filming, gossip columnists discovered her recently concluded love affair with Sammy Davis, Jr., at a time when interracial affairs were rare and guaranteed to provoke scandal. Harry Cohn, Columbia’s much-hated studio head, hadn’t wanted her for the movie in the first place and went ballistic over the bad publicity. Richard Quine, Novak’s champion and protector, had talked Cohn into letting her play Gillian. Over the years, Cohn and Novak had gradually worked out a relationship of grudging mutual respect, but the mogul still tended to treat her like an empty-headed sex symbol, and she had mixed feelings about him. When Cohn suddenly died, before filming ended on *BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE*, Novak was devastated, especially when she learned that Cohn’s wife blamed the Sammy Davis scandal for his fatal heart attack.

Novak then began an affair with Quine. This serious, long-term, on-again, off-again relationship began with a good friendship and may have just missed progressing to marriage—but, while still working on *BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE* and involved with Quine, she began a new, even more scandalous affair with Lieutenant General Rafael “Ram” Trujillo, son of the dictator of the Dominican Republic. Lurid stories circulated about Novak profiting from Trujillo’s political and financial corruption. The affair became an international diplomatic incident. The Federal government made her give back some lavish gifts bought with tainted money, and tried to force her to break off the relationship. She defied that last demand, but later ended it herself, when she decided that marriage might hurt her career. Several years later, however, at the height of her career, Kim Novak got sick of all the hype, pressure, loss of privacy and emotional stress that came with stardom. She left Hollywood behind. She built herself a normal life, where she could be a “normal human being.”

In *BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE*, Gillian finds herself crying real tears over the loss of Shep. She realizes that she’s fallen in love when she loses her powers as a witch and Pyewacket deserts her to become Queenie’s familiar.

When Queenie uses the cat to lure Shep to see Gillian again, he discovers she’s shed her arty, bohemian look. Be-



Elsa Lanchester, Jack Lemmon, and Kim Novak conjured up a special magic in *BELL BOOK AND CANDLE* (1958).

fore, she wore only slinky black and red. Now, she wears a frothy, pastel dress. (Novak carries off both looks with ease.) Gillian has cleared all the primitive art out of her shop and moved in conventional (trite) shell and flower arrangements.

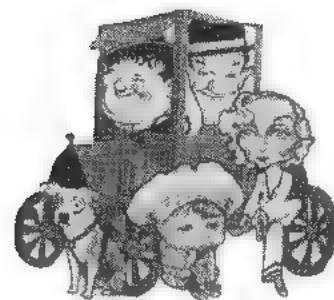
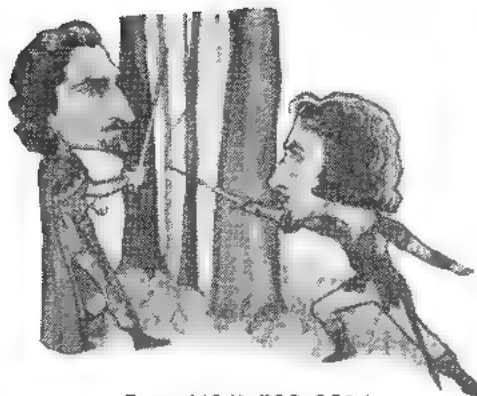
Of course, the lovers reconcile. It won’t have to be a mixed marriage any more. Like Jennifer in *I MARRIED A WITCH*, she’s not a subversive outsider now. As Shep marvels at Gillian’s tears, she confesses, “I’m only human.” They embrace, obviously headed straight for Happily Ever After—but, in order to find true love, has she found her true self or sacrificed it? How long will her conversion last? Some people in the modern audience don’t see this as an unequivocally happy ending and prefer Gillian as a witch!

In *I MARRIED A WITCH* and *BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE* (and in the long-running TV sitcom *BEWITCHED*, which was inspired by both), the witches don’t consistently represent just one type of outsider. They’re Communists, they’re intellectuals, they’re radicals, they’re—gay! (Though homosexuality is never mentioned, *BEWITCHED* remains one of the gayest shows ever to hit the small screen. The company was well aware of the series’ sexual subtext, and many cast members—Agnes Moorehead, Paul Lynde, and Maurice Evans, among them—were gay themselves.) Similarly in real life, it’s striking how often the most extreme, paranoid diatribes from the blacklist era lump several categories of outsiders together: “Niggerjewcommiekikebastards,” the words running together in one long shriek of vomituous racial abuse,” Walter Bernstein writes, describing the hate speech of rioters outside a Paul Robeson concert (*Inside Out: A Memoir of the Blacklist*, Knopf, 1996).

Even the more rational red-baiters, such as John Beaty, in *The Iron Curtain Over America* (Wilkinson, 1951), often say essentially the same thing—albeit in more civilized-sounding language. Beaty takes 237 pages (not counting the lengthy, elaborately cross-referenced index) to explain why he thinks Jews are likely to be Communists or Communist sympathizers and how he thinks this influence subverts the U. S. government and the media. Between 1951 and 1954 alone, Beaty’s book sold out 11 hardback printings, and had plenty of like-minded company on the bookshelves.

The prevalence of this type of lump-’em-all-together thinking is probably why, in *I MARRIED A WITCH* and *BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE*, the characters’ vocabulary constantly shifts, from the language of common stereotypes of witches, to homophobic stereotypes, to stereotypes of communists, Jews, and so on. In right-wing fantasy land, the witches are all those people—all dangerous, all a threat to the American way. Not real Americans. Not like us . . .





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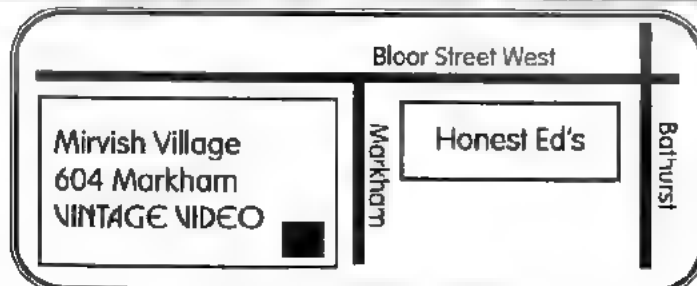


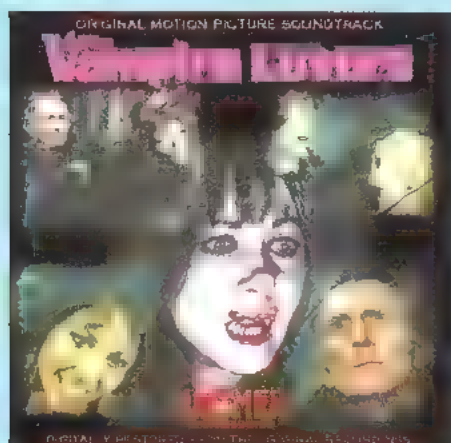
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many years had remained in
the colonies. In the meantime
the girl married. In fact she
became Mrs. Leaped into the
pool and was hit, in fact
recovered his conscience, a bit of
a woman herself.

Nothing strange taking
and rather large, all composed
Kia and heavy carbonaceous
shell as well as chert and
crystallized.

They began one of the most amazing evenings and one of the most amazing books we have ever experienced. In the words of Nacashima, a Japanese builder builds a house. Hashimoto Yogi at Holston mirrors pairs into significance. "The night and Nacashima, the rakesdri I recall. Madmen were here once. Not still now." The novel she adds in the Thorne Lynch gives an other immortal. Mr Henry the end bimodal who could not end.

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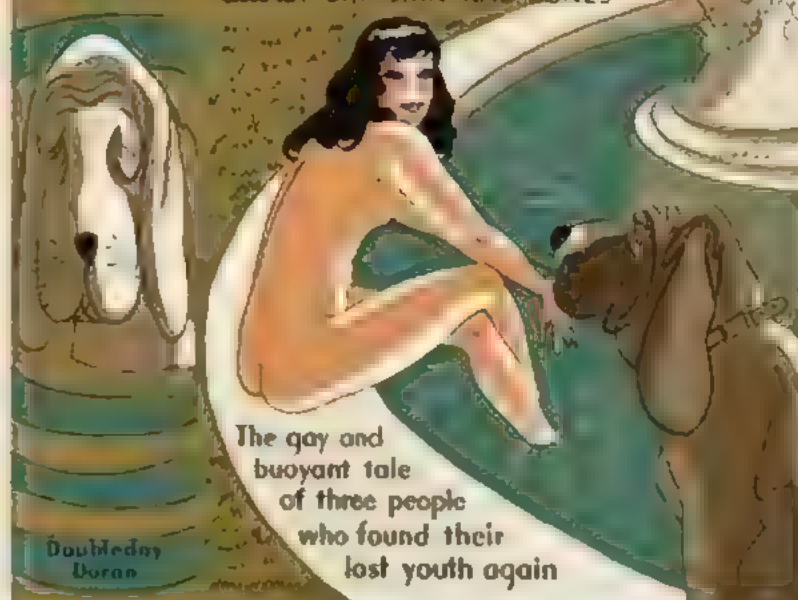


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of three people
who found their
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quiet thread with between a
man and his mistress on their
quarrelsome making care, speeds
up to the hilarious tempo of a
mad ride on a buck and ladder,
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[illegible]

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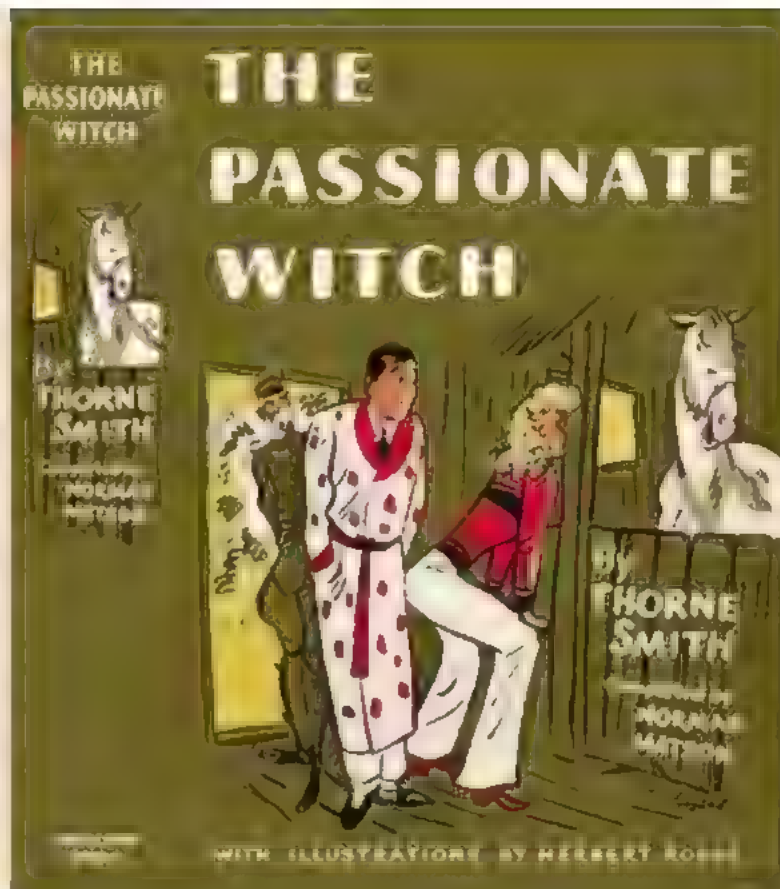
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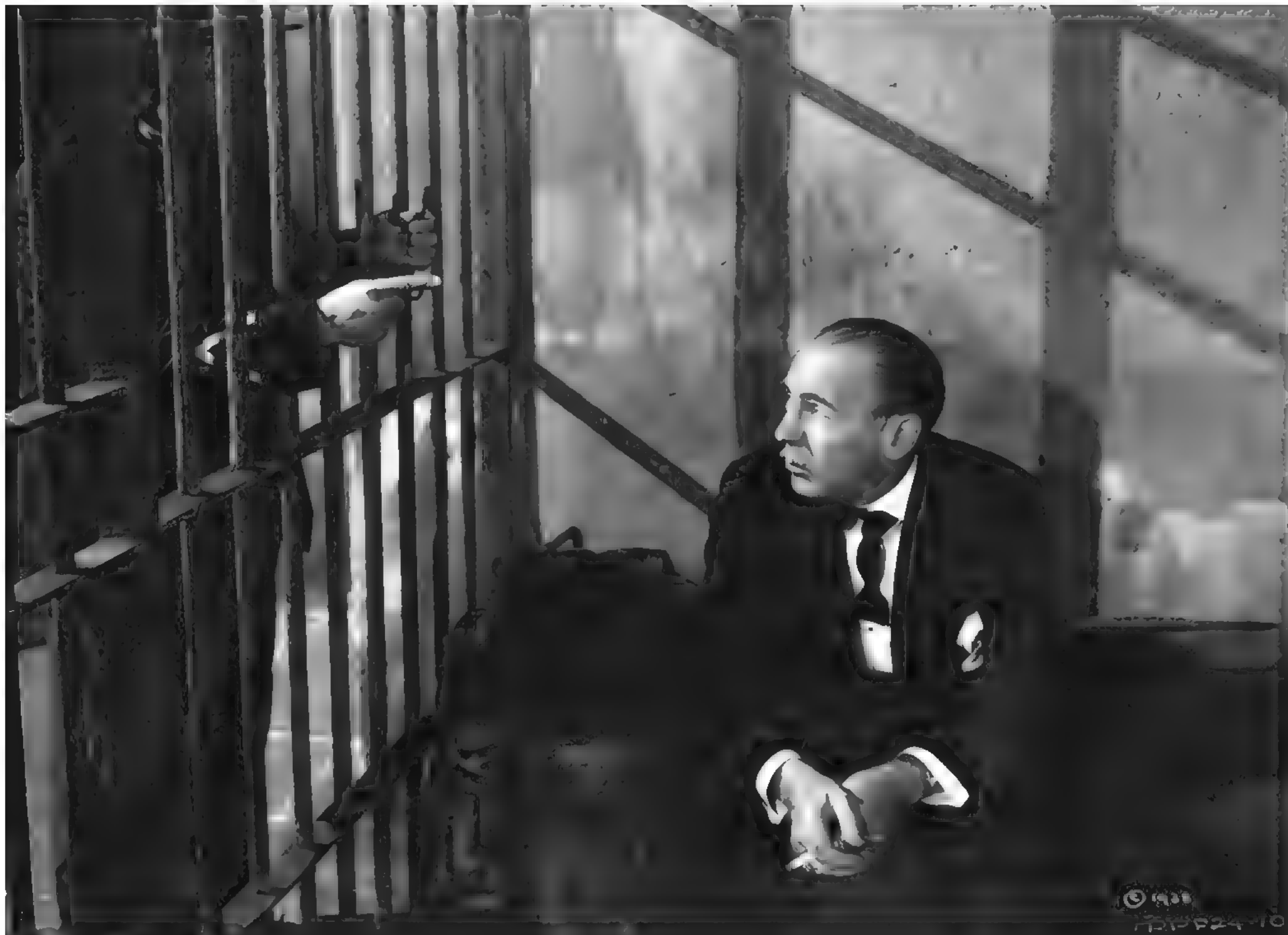
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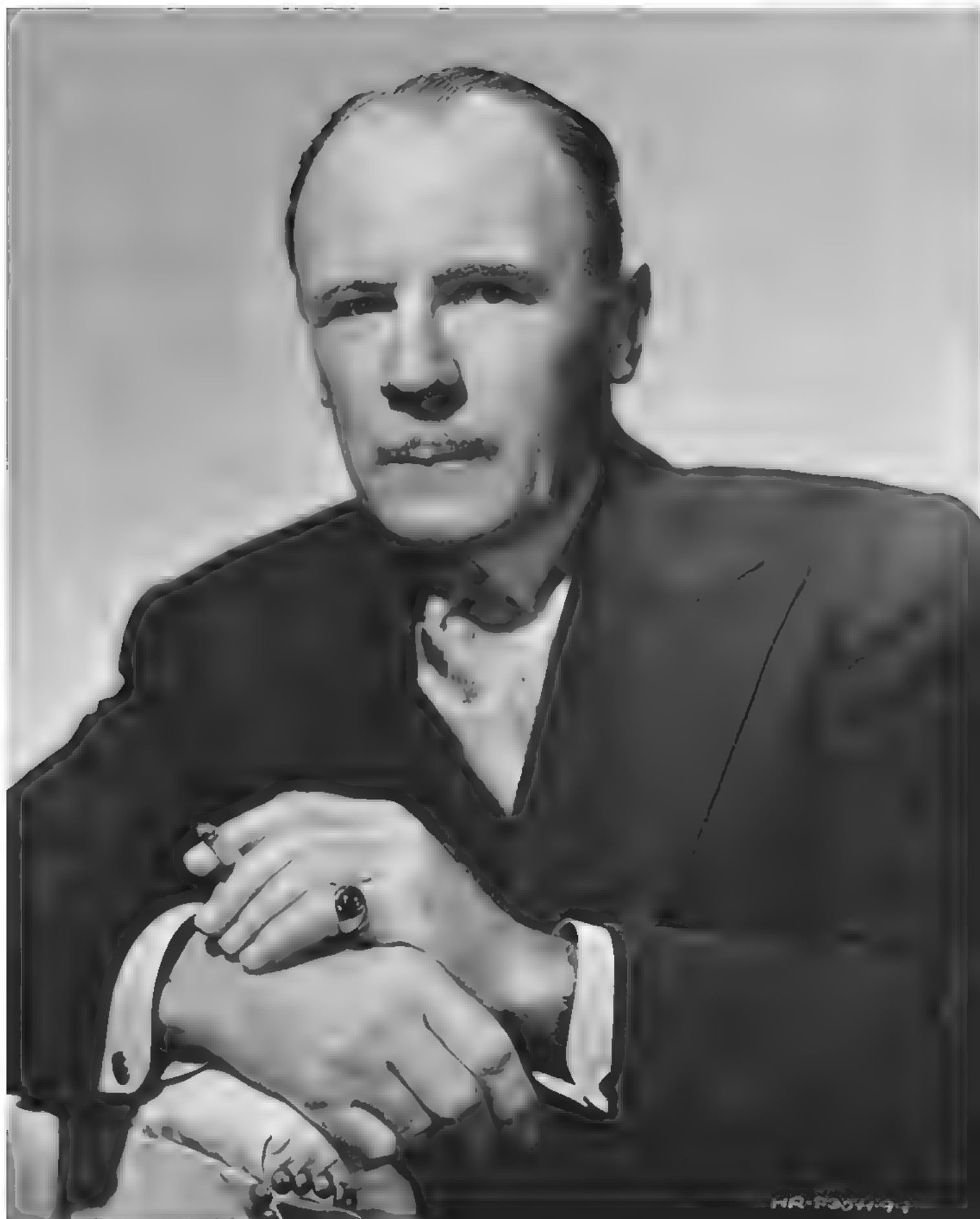
















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